The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S Mystery Magazine

ALL NEW ISSUE

OCTOBER 1962

Margaret Millar
Avram Davidson
Patricia Highsmith
George Sumner Albee
Pat McGerr
Edgar Pangborn
Veronica Parker Johns
Hal Ellson
Paul W. Fairman
Margaret Austin
Michael Zuroy
Dorothy Fletcher
K. T. Edwards

13 new stories ...and every one unusual!

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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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ALL NEW ISSUE

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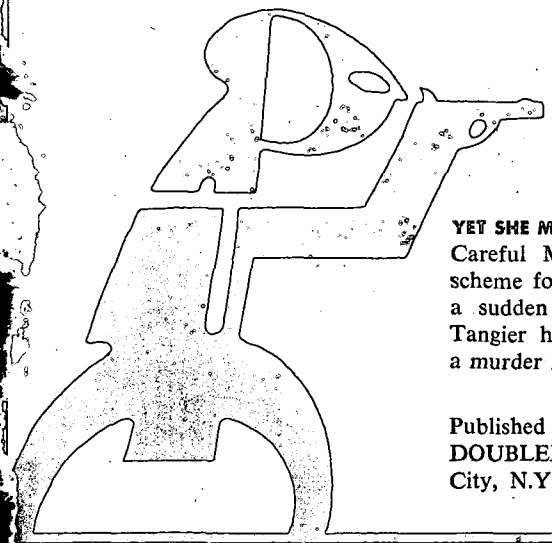
CRÈME DE LA CRIME



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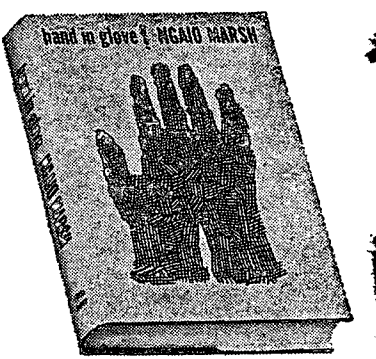

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HAND IN GLOVE

LITTLE, BROWN

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AVRAM DAVIDSON**
TITLE:	***Revolver***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*A kind of roundelay in prose, and a bitter, ironic slice of life—in the raw. Yes, life is real, life is earnest . . .*

THERE WAS A MR. EDWARD MASON who dealt in real estate. His kind of real estate consisted mainly of old brownstone houses into which Mr. Mason crammed a maximum number of tenants by turning each room into a single apartment. Legally this constituted "increasing available residence space" or some similar phrase. As a result of this deed of civic good, Mr. Mason was enabled to get tax rebates, rent increases which were geometrically rather than arithmetically calculated, and a warm glow around his heart.

Mr. Mason's tenants were a select group, hand-picked; one might say—to use a phrase favored in other facets of the real estate profession—that his holdings were "restricted." He didn't care for tenants who had steady employment. You might think this was odd of him, but that would be because you didn't know the philanthropic cast of Mr. Mason's mind. He favored the lame, the halt, and the blind; he preferred the old and the feeble; he had no scruples, far from it, against mothers without marriage licenses.

And his kindheartedness was rewarded. For, after all, employment, no matter how steady, can sometimes be terminated. And then rent cannot be paid. A landlord who can't collect rent is a landlord who can't meet his own expenses—in short, a landlord who is bound to go out of business. In which case

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it follows that he is a landlord who can no longer practice philanthropy.

Therefore, Mr. Mason would be obliged to evict such a tenant in order to protect his other tenants.

But, owing to his care, foresight, and selectivity, he had no such tenants. Not any more. No, sir. All his tenants at the time our account begins were in receipt of a steady income not derived from employment. Welfare checks come in regularly, and so do old-age assistance checks, state aid checks, and several other variety of checks more or less unknown to the average citizen (and may he never have to know of them from the recipients' point of view—that is our prayer for him), the average citizen whose tax dollar supplies said checks.

Then, too, people who earn their own income are inclined to take a high-handed attitude toward landlords. They seem to think that the real estate investor has nothing better to do with his income than to lavish it on fancy repairs to his property. But a tenant whose soul has been purified by long years as the recipient of public charity is a tenant who is less troublesome, whose tastes are less finicking, who is in no position to carry on about such *rerae natura* as rats, mice, roaches, crumbling plaster, leaky pipes, insufficient heat, dirt, rot, and the like.

Is it not odd, then, that after a term of years of being favored by the philanthropic attentions of Mr. Mason and similarly minded entrepreneurs, the neighborhood was said to have "gone down"? It could not really be, could it, that garbage, for instance, was collected less frequently than in other sections of town? Or that holes in streets and sidewalks were not repaired as quickly as in "better" neighborhoods? Surely it was a mere coincidence that these things were so —if, indeed, they were so at all.

And anyway, didn't the City make up for it by providing more protection? Weren't patrol cars seen on the streets thereabouts more often than eleswhere? Weren't policemen usually seen on the streets in congenial groups of three? To say nothing of plainclothesmen.

This being the case, it was disconcerting for Mr. Mason to acknowledge that crime seemed to be on the increase in the neighborhood where he practiced his multifold benevolences. But no other conclusion seemed possible. Stores were held up, apartments burglarized, cars broken into, purses snatched, people mugged—

It was almost enough to destroy one's faith in human nature.

Finally, there was no other choice but for Mr. Mason to secure a revolver, and a license for same. Being a respectable citizen, a taxpayer, and one with a legitimate reason to go armed—the necessity to protect himself and the collection of his tenants' rents—he had no

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difficulty in obtaining either . . .

Among Mr. Mason's tenants was a Mrs. Richards. She was quite insistent, whenever the matter was raised (though it was never raised by Mr. Mason, who was totally indifferent to such items), that "Mrs." was no mere courtesy title. She had, indeed, been married to Mr. Richards and she had a snapshot of Mr. Richards to prove it. The wedding may have occurred in North Carolina, or perhaps in South Carolina. Nor did she recall the town or county where the happy event took place: Mr. Richards (she *did* remember that his given name was Charley) had been a traveling man. Also, it was a long time ago.

Mrs. Richards may have been a bit feeble-minded, but she possessed other qualities, such as a warm, loving, and open—very open—heart. She had two children by the evanescent Mr. Richards, and two children by two other gentlemen, with whom she had been scrupulous not to commit bigamy; and was currently awaiting the birth in about six months of her fifth child, the father of whom she thought was most probably a young man named Curtis.

Current social welfare policy held that it would be destructive to the family unit to suggest that Mrs. Richards, now or at any time, place her children in a day nursery and go out and labor for her (and their) bread. Consequently, she was supplied with a monthly check made up with city, state, and federal taxes. It cannot be said that the amount of the check was lavish, but Mrs. Richards did not demand very much and was easily satisfied. She had never been trained in any craft, trade, or profession, and if anyone was crude or unkind enough to suggest that she had enough skill required to manipulate a scrub-brush and -bucket, she would point out that when she did this her back hurt her.

The state of the floor of her "apartment," on the day when Mr. Mason came to call, at an hour nicely calculated with reference to the mail schedule, indicated that Mrs. Richards had not risked backache lately.

After an exchange of greetings, Mr. Mason said, "If you've cashed your check, I've got the receipt made out."

"I don't believe it's come," she said placidly. This was her routine reply. It was her belief that eventually it might be believed, although it never had been; nor was it now.

"If you spend the rent money on something else," Mr. Mason said, "I'll have to go down to The Welfare and have them close your case." This was his routine reply.

Curtis, in a peremptory tone, said, "Give the man his money." The prospect of approaching fatherhood had raised in him no tender sentiment; in fact, it raised no sentiment at all other than an in-

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creasing daily restlessness and a conviction that it was time for him to move on.

Without so much as a sigh Mrs. Richards now produced an envelope from her bosom and examined it closely. "I guess maybe it might be this one," she said. "I haven't opened it."

Curtis, quite tired of every routine gambit of his lady-love, now said, quite testily, *"Give* the *man* his *money!"* He wanted cigarettes and he wanted whiskey and he knew that neither of these could be had until the check was cashed. "If I got to *hit* you—"

Mrs. Richards endorsed the check with her landlord's pen, and Mr. Mason began to count out her change. A new consideration now entered Curtis' mind—previously occupied only by the desire for cigarettes, whiskey, and moving on; it entered with such extreme suddenness that it gave him no time to reflect on it. He observed that Mr. Mason had a revolver in a shoulder holster inside his coat and he observed that Mr. Mason's wallet was quite engorged with money.

Curtis was not naturally malevolent, but he was naturally impulsive. He whipped Mr. Mason's revolver from its holster, struck Mr. Mason heavily on the side of the head with it, and seized his wallet.

Mr. Mason went down, but he went down slowly. He thought he was shouting for help, but the noise coming out of his mouth was no louder than a mew. He was on his hands and knees by the time Curtis reached the door, and then he slid to one side and lay silent.

Mrs. Richards sat for a moment in her chair. New situations were things she was not well equipped to cope with. After the sound of Curtis' feet on the stairs ceased, she continued to sit for some time, looking at Mr. Mason.

Presently a thought entered her mind. The familiar-looking piece of paper on the dirty table was a receipt for her rent. The money scattered around was the money Mr. Mason had been counting out to cash her check. His practice was to count it out twice and then deduct the amount of the rent.

Mrs. Richards slowly gathered up the money, slowly counted it, moving her lips. It was all there.

And so was the receipt.

Mrs. Richards nodded. She *now* had the receipt for her rent *and* the money. True, she no longer had Curtis, but, then, she knew he was bound to move along sooner or later. Men always did.

She hid the rent money in one of the holes with which the walls of the "apartment" were plentifully supplied, and then reflected on what she had better do next.

All things considered, she decided it was best to start screaming.

Curtis went down the stairs rapidly, but once in the street he had sense enough to walk at a normal

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pace. Running men were apt to attract the attention of the police.

Three blocks away was a saloon he favored with his trade. He entered by the back door, causing a buzzer to sound. He tried to slip quickly into the Men's Room, but wasn't quite quick enough to escape the attention of the bartender-proprietor, an irascible West Indian called Jumby, and no great friend of Curtis'.

"Another customer for the toilet trade," said Jumby, so loudly that he could be heard through the closed door. "I'd make more money if I gave the drinks away free and charged admission to the water closet!"

Curtis ignored this familiar complaint, and emptied the wallet of its money, dropping the empty leather case into the trash container which stood, full of used paper towels, alongside the sink. Then he left.

Police cars sped by him, their sirens screaming.

Vague thoughts of cigarettes and whiskey still floated in Curtis' mind, but the desire to move on was by now uppermost. It was with some relief, therefore, that he saw a young man sitting in an open convertible. The convertible was elegantly fitted out, and so was the young man. His name was William.

"You've been talking about going to California, William," Curtis said.

"I have *al*so been talking," William said with precision, "about finding some con*gen*ial person with *mon*ey to share the ex*pens*es of going to California."

Curtis said, "I hit the numbers. I got money enough to take care of all the expenses. Don't that make me congenial?"

"Very *much* so," said William, opening the door. Curtis started to slide in, but William stopped him with a long, impeccably groomed hand, which touched him lightly. "Curtis," he said in low but firm tones, "if you have something *on* you, I really must *insist* that you get *rid* of it first. Suppose I meet you here in an *hour?* That will also enable me to *pack.*"

"One hour," Curtis said.

He went into another bar, obtained cigarettes and whiskey. At the bar was a man generally, if not quite popularly, known as The Rock.

"How you doing, Rock?" Curtis inquired.

The Rock said nothing.

"Got some business to talk over with you," Curtis went on.

The Rock continued to say nothing.

"Like to take in a movie?" Curtis asked.

The Rock finished his drink, set down the glass, looked at Curtis. Curtis put down money, left the bar, The Rock behind him. He bought two tickets at the movie theater and they went in. The house was almost empty.

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After a minute or two Curtis whispered, "Fifty dollars buys a gun. I got it on me."

The Rock took out a handkerchief, spread it in his lap, counted money into it, passed it to Curtis. After a moment Curtis passed the handkerchief back. The Rock soon left, but Curtis stayed on. He still had the better part of an hour to kill.

The Rock took a bus and traveled a mile. He walked a few blocks on a side street and entered a house which, like most of its fellows, bore a sign that it has been selected for something euphemistically called "Urban Renewal," and that further renting of rooms was illegal. Most of the windows were already marked with large X signs.

On the second floor The Rock disturbed a teenage boy and girl in close, though wordless, conversation. The boy looked up in some annoyance, but after a quick glance decided to say nothing. The girl clutched his arm until the intruder passed.

The door on the third floor was locked, but The Rock pushed hard, once, and it yielded. The room was ornately furnished, and the dressing table was crowded with perfumes and cosmetics and a large doll; but seated on the bed was a man.

"It ain't you," the man said. He was red-eyed drunk.

"It ain't me," The Rock agreed.

"It's Humpty Slade," said the man on the bed. "*He* don't pay for her rent. *He* don't buy her no clothes. *He* don't feed her. *I* do."

The Rock nodded his massive head.

"Everybody knows that," The Rock said. He took a handkerchief out of his pocket, laid it on the bed, opened its folds. "Seventy-five dollars," he said.

A quick turnover and a modest profit—that was The Rock's policy.

The boy and girl, now seated on the stairs, shrank to one side as he came down. They did not look up. It was not very uncomfortable there in that all but abandoned house; but it was private—as private as you can get when you have no place of your own to go.

Upstairs, on the bed, the waiting man stared at the revolver with his red, red eyes . . .

After a while the boy and the girl sauntered down into the street and went separate ways in search of something to eat. But after supper they met again in the same hallway.

Scarcely had they taken their places when they were disturbed. A man and woman came up, talking loudly. They paused at the sight of the younger pair in the dim light of the single bulb, and for a moment the two couples looked at one another. The older woman was handsome, flamboyantly dressed and made up. Her companion was

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large and on the ugly side, his looks not improved by a crooked shoulder which jutted back on one side.

"What are you kids doing here?" he demanded. "Go on, get out—"

"Oh, now, Humphrey," the woman pleaded. "You leave them alone. They ain't hurting nobody."

"Okay, sugar," the big man said submissively. They continued up the stairs. The boy and girl listened as they fumbled at the door. Then the woman's voice went high and shrill with fear, screaming, *"No—no—no—"*

At the loud sound of the revolver the boy and girl leaped to their feet. Something fell past them, and landed below with a thud.

"You'd point a gun at *me?"* a man's voice growled. Then there was the noise of a blow.

"My woman—!"

"You'd take a shot at *me?"*

The sound of fist on flesh, again and again. The boy and girl crept down the stairs.

"No, Humpty, don't hit me any more! I'm sorry, Humpty! I didn't mean it! I was—oh, please, Humpty! *Please?"*

"Don't hit him any more, honey. He was drunk. Honey—"

The boy and girl stopped at the bottom floor for only a moment. Then they were gone . . .

Curtis paused, uncertain. He was sure that it was dangerous for him to remain on the street, but he didn't know where to go. That little rat, William, had failed to reappear. There were planes flying, and trains and buses running, but even if he decided what to take he would still have to decide *which* airfield, *which* station, *which* terminal. The problems seemed to proliferate each time he thought about them.

He would have a drink to help him consider.

There wasn't really any hurry.

That dirty rat, William!

The Sepoy Lords were holding an informal meeting—a caucus, as it were.

Someone has remarked that the throne of Russia was neither hereditary, nor elective, but occupative. The same might be said of office in the Sepoy Lords.

The scene was a friendly neighborhood rooftop.

"So you think you're going to be Warlord?" a boy named Buzz demanded.

"That's right," said the one called Sonny.

The quorum, including several Sepoy Ladies, listened with interest.

"I don't think you're going to be Warlord," said Buzz.

"I *know* I am," said Sonny.

"What makes you so sure?" inquired Buzz.

"This," Sonny said, simply, reaching into his pocket, and taking something out.

Sudden intakes of breath, eyes

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lighting up, members crowding around, loud comments of admiration. "Sonny got a *piece!*" *"Look* at that piece Sonny's got!"

The President of the Sepoy Lords, one Big Arthur, who had until now remained above the battle, asked, "Where'd you get it, Son'."

Sonny smirked, cocked his head. *"She* knows where I got it," he said. His girl, Myra, smiled knowingly.

Buzz said only one word, but he said it weakly. He now had no case, and he knew it.

The new Warlord sighted wickedly down the revolver. *"First* thing I'm going to do," he announced; "there's one old cat I am going to *burn*. He said something about my old lady, and that is something I don't take from *any*body, let alone from one of those dirty old Ermine Kings."

Diplomatically, no one commented on the personal aspect of his grievance, all being well aware how easy it was to say something about Sonny's old lady, and being equally aware that the old lady's avenging offspring now held a revolver in his hand. But the general aspect of the challenge was something else.

"Those Ermine Kings better watch out, is all!" a Sepoy Lady declared. There was a murmur of assent.

Big Arthur now deemed it time to interpose his authority. "Oh, yeah, sure," he said. " 'They better watch out!'—how come? Because we got one piece?"

Warlord Sonny observed a semantic inconsistency. With eyes narrowed he said, "What do you mean, 'we'? *'We'* haven't got *any*thing. *I'm* the one who's got the piece, and *no*body is going to tell me what to do with my personal property—see?" He addressed this caveat to the exuberant Sepoy Lady, but no one misunderstood him—least of all, Big Arthur.

Allowing time for the message to sink in, Sonny then said, "Big Arthur is right. I mean, one ain't enough. We need money to get more. How? I got a plan. Listen—"

They listened. They agreed. They laughed their satisfaction.

"Now," Sonny concluded, "let's get going."

He watched as most of them filed through the door. He started after them, then stopped. *Was* stopped. Big Arthur seized his wrist with one hand and grabbed the revolver with the other.

Sonny, crying, "Gimme that back!" leaped for it. But Big Arthur, taking hold of Sonny's jacket with his free hand, slapped him—hard—back against the door.

"You got the wrong idea, Son'," Big Arthur said. "You seem to think that *you* are the President around here. That's *wrong*. Now, if you really think you are man enough, you can try to get this piece away from me. You want to try?"

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For a while Sonny had been somebody. Now he was nobody again. He knew that he would never in a million years take the revolver away from Big Arthur, never burn that one old cat from the Ermine Kings who had said something about his old lady. Tears of pain and humiliation welled in his eyes.

"Cheer up," Big Arthur said. "We're going to see how your plan works out. And it better work out *good*. Now get down those stairs with the other members, Mr. Sonny Richards."

Head down, Sonny stumbled through the door. Myra started to slip through after him, but Big Arthur detained her. "Not so quick, chick," he said. "Let's move along together. You and me are going to get better acquainted." For just a second Myra hesitated. Then she giggled.

"*Much* better acquainted," Big Arthur said.

Feeling neither strain nor pain, Curtis glided out of the bar. The late afternoon spread invitingly before him. He was supposed to meet somebody and go somewhere . . . William . . .

There, slowly passing by in his fancy convertible, was the man himself. With great good humor Curtis cried, "William!" and started toward him.

William himself saw things from a different angle. Curtis, to be sure, was *rough*, but what had really set William against going to California with him was the fact that he had observed Curtis that way. He, William, wanted nothing to do at any time with people who carried guns. And, anyway, he wasn't quite ready to leave for California—something had come up.

What came up at that moment was Curtis, roaring (so it seemed) with rage, and loping forward with murder in his eye.

William gave a squeak of fright. The convertible leaped ahead, crashing into the car in front. And still Curtis came on—

Screaming, "Keep away from me, Curtis!" William jumped out of the car and started to run. Someone grabbed him. "Don't stop me—he's got a gun—Curt*is!*" he yelled.

But they wouldn't let go. It was the police, wouldn't you know it, grim-faced men in plain clothes; of all the cars to crash into—

One of them finished frisking Curtis. "Nope, no gun," he said. "This one ain't dangerous. *You.*" He turned to William. "What do you mean by saying he had a gun?"

William lost his head and started to babble, and before he could move, the men were searching *him*. And the *car*. They found his cigarette case stuffed with sticks of tea, and they found the shoebox full of it, too.

"Pot," said one of them, sniffing. "Real Mexican stuff. Convertible, hey? You won't need a convertible for a long time, fellow."

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William burst into tears. The mascara ran down his face and he looked so grotesque that even the grim faces of the detectives had to relax into smiles.

"What about this one, Leo," one of them asked, jerking his thumb. "He's clean."

But Leo was dubious. "There must be some connection, or the pretty one wouldn't of been so scared," he said. A thought occurred to him. "What did he call him? What did you say his name was? Curtis?"

The other detective snapped his fingers. "Curtis. Yeah. A question, Curtis: You in the apartment of a Mrs. Selena Richards today?"

"*Never* heard of her," said Curtis, sobering rapidly. Move on, that's what he should have done—move on.

Mrs. Richards was entertaining company. The baby was awake—had been awake, in fact, since those chest-deep, ear-splitting screams earlier in the afternoon—and the girls had come home from school. She had sent them down to the store for cold cuts and sliced bread; they hadn't eaten more than half of it on the way back, and Mrs. Richards and the neighbors were dining off the other half. There was also some wine they had all chipped in to buy. Excitement didn't come very often, and it was a shame to let it go to waste.

"Didn't that man *bleed!*" a neighbor exclaimed. "All over your floor, Selena!"

"All over *his* floor, you mean—*he* owns this building."

After the whoops of laughter died down, someone thought of asking where Mrs. Richards oldest child was.

"I don't know where Sonny is," she said, placid as ever. "He takes after his daddy. His daddy always was a traveling sort of man." She felt in her bosom for the money she had placed there—the money she had taken from the hole in the wall after the police and ambulance left. Yes, it was safely there.

All in all, she thought, it had been quite a day. Curtis gone, but he was on the point of becoming troublesome, anyway. Excitement—a *lot* of excitement. Company in, hanging on her every word. The receipt for the rent, *plus* the rent itself. Yes, a lucky day. Later on she would see what the date was, and tomorrow she would play that number.

If luck was coming to you, nothing could keep it away.

They had taken three stitches in Mr. Mason's scalp, and taped and bandaged it.

"You want us to call you a taxi?" the hospital attendant asked.

"No," Mr. Mason said. "I don't have any money to waste on taxis. The bus is still running, isn't it?"

"There's a charge of three dollars," the attendant said.

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Mr. Mason snorted. "I don't have three cents. I'll have to borrow bus fare from some storekeeper, I guess. That dirty — he took everything I had. Right in broad daylight. I don't know what we pay taxes for."

"I guess we pay them to reward certain people for turning decent buildings into flophouses," the attendant said. He was old and crusty and due to retire soon, and didn't give a damn for anybody.

Mr. Mason narrowed his eyes and looked at him. "Nobody has the right to tell me what to do with my personal property," he said meanly.

The attendant shrugged. "That's your personal property, too," he said, pointing. "Take it with you; we don't want it."

It was the empty shoulder holster.

On leaving the hospital Mr. Mason headed first for a store, but not to borrow bus fare. He bought a book of blank receipts. He still had most of his rents to collect, and he intended to collect every single one of them. It hardly paid a person to be decent, these days, he reflected irritably. One thing was sure: nobody else had better tangle with him—not today.

He headed for the first house on his round, and it was there, in the hallway, that the Sepoy Lords caught up with him.

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Is this the first crime short story about the new dance craze, the twist? Probably not—but it is the first one received by EQMM . . . "Go, guy, go, gal, go, go, Go!"

MURDER TO THE TWIST

by PAT McGERR

IT WAS THEIR FIRST WEDDING anniversary and nothing had been spared to make it a memorable occasion. After an exotic buffet inside the penthouse, the company moved out to the star-lit terrace where a scattering of small tables encircled a miniature dance floor to create a night-club atmosphere, complete with decorations of peppermint-stick red and white. On a low platform sat the quintet whose globe-faced vocalist was at that moment New York's most popular entertainer. Even the full moon, which gave light and shadow to the East River fifteen stories below, seemed part of the host's careful planning.

"A good idea," said a guest, mentally computing the party's budget, "to go all out on anniversary Number One, since they'll probably never celebrate Number Two."

"I wouldn't bet on that," said another. "The little girl's got a couple of million dollars by the nose. She's not going to be so quick to let it go."

"And the old man never lets go of anything," a third reminded. "You may have to eat your words at their silver wedding anniversary."

"Let's see," said the man with a head for figures. "Then he'll be nearly eighty and the bride will still be under fifty."

"Probably still under forty, the way women add."

They glanced toward the table on the other side of the terrace and laughed.

Their host felt their gaze and saw their laughter. He'd had twelve months to get used to being laughed at, but it still made him writhe. A realist, he had known on the day she first substituted for his ailing secretary that he would have to choose between making himself ridiculous and putting her completely out of his mind. No man more than he hated the thought of being a figure of fun—but he couldn't control his thoughts or the unfamiliar surge of desire he felt each time he saw her.

So they were married and for six months it wasn't too bad. She was fascinated by her sudden wealth, found sufficient excitement in buying things she'd never had, going

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places she'd never been to, living in luxury she'd never known. But then the jewels and furs and obsequious headwaiters became routine, and her husband had nothing else to give her.

It was at that crucial time she began to notice, with a growing and reciprocated interest, her husband's top assistant who was handsome, clever, and ambitious. Then behind her husband's back the former grins and wisecracks turned to sneers and scandal. For a man of 50, by himself, is in the prime of life; but a fiftyish man married to a twentyish girl ages rapidly, and when his wife takes a young lover, he becomes automatically an old fool. And he was, as is traditional, the last to know.

Now they sat there, the three of them, at a table near the orchestra. The girl wanted the young man, but she also wanted her husband's money. The young man wanted the girl, but he also wanted his good job with her husband's firm. And the husband, more than anything else, wanted the dignity which his marriage had stripped from him. To lose her now to his own employee would compound his folly, make him even more of a laughingstock. Thus his pride and their avarice formed twin barriers to the divorce that might otherwise have been such a simple solution.

Champagne in a bucket stood beside each table and waiters moved about discreetly, filling orders for drink stronger than wine. A trumpet wail cut through the murmur of conversation and the vocalist, not yet singing, began to move his body convulsively.

"The honeymoon may be over," someone said, "but she's still calling the tune. The old man would never have picked Skinny Skeeter's band —not while Guy Lombardo is alive."

The first number was the *Anniversary Waltz*, though the extra beat made it hard to recognize. The host led his wife out to the floor, and after they'd made one circuit, other couples followed till the dancing area was packed. But the next musical selection was more typical of the talent, and the crowd began to thin.

"Twist your toes, twist your tail, twist your torso," shouted Skinny, and few of the older dancers were willing or able to comply.

The younger man tapped his host on the shoulder. "Shall I take over, sir?" he asked politely.

"You think this is more your speed than mine?" Those at nearby tables caught an edge of anger under his controlled tone.

"Well, sir, it is a bit lively."

"Don't worry about me, boy. I can still keep up with you—and maybe a few steps ahead. Come on." He jerked his wife away from the other man and again began to dance. While the music lasted, his contortions were almost as violent as those of the man on the bandstand who

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was paid to shake. Then the musicians took a ten-minute break and everybody rested. The host's face was a purplish red; thick drops of perspiration rimmed his eyes and stood out above his lips. His heavy breathing punctuated the tinkle of glass and ice.

Across the table his wife and her lover exchanged quick nods. Both were remembering the medical report the host's assistant had found several weeks ago in his employer's desk. It spoke of a damaged heart muscle, strongly recommended care and rest, the avoidance of exertion and excitement. The verdict emblazoned in their minds was in alternatives—he might, by living quietly, eke out another ten to twenty years, but overactivity could cut him off in less than one. The older man had mentioned the report to no one, in accord with his new habit of minimizing every sign of age or disability.

But its discovery gave the other two fresh hope. They noted that he was slyly trying to follow the instructions to take it easy, and they, with equal slyness, began to thwart him. By subtle references to his age his wife was often able to shame him out of an afternoon nap or early-evening retirement. His assistant thrust back on his shoulders the high-tension meetings at which he had previously been so eager to substitute. Both found that to suggest he was too old for any activity was to guarantee his spirited participation.

But it was all a slow process and the two young people had grown impatient. This anniversary party appeared to be their first best opportunity. By morning, if they could keep him dancing, she might be a wealthy widow.

The young man leaned forward solicitously as the bandmen once more took up their instruments. "Perhaps I should ask them to play something a little quieter?" he suggested.

"Yes, do," said the girl. "Another waltz would be nice."

"Not for me," her husband snapped. "Anybody who can't stand this tempo can sit it out."

"But darling," she protested, "that last dance was pretty strenuous. And you're not exactly a teenager, you know. Don't you think you should rest a while?"

"I'll rest when the party's over," he retorted, "not while I'm paying for the hottest band in town."

"Go, guy, go, gal, go, go, *go!*" yelled Skinny, and again the old husband and the young wife went out on the floor. More couples, caught up almost involuntarily in the frenzied beat, joined them and soon the narrow space was jammed with seething flesh. Some of the dancers were forced outside the lighted circle to seek gyrating space in the area between the tables and the roof's outer edge.

The host and his wife were among those who left the center and found a private corner off to the side of the

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orchestra platform. It was a dance that called for the partners to stay apart, twisting in harmony but without physical contact, and here they had room to do so. But he kept moving toward her, closing the gap between them, and she kept moving away from him until her back touched the roof's iron railing.

It happened very quickly, faster even than the music.

The corner was dark, outside the vision of most of the guests. Only a few were watching them and those few not closely. The majority knew nothing until they heard her call out—a rending, high-pitched scream that silenced music and voices.

When they rushed over, he was lying prone, his head almost over the roof's edge, and below, far below, her spangled dress was a small shimmer of white on the sidewalk.

The guard rail, swinging free, told the story. Her body, given force and weight by the momentum of the dance, had hurtled against it, pulling the rail ends out of the concrete in which they had been embedded. The new dance craze—the "twist"—was already responsible for twisted ankles, knees, and spines; but now it had claimed its first fatality.

They pulled him back from the edge but they did not try to move him farther till his gasping breath quieted and his pulse slowed. The babble of voices hardly penetrated his consciousness. *It's all right,* he thought, *all according to plan*—the plan he'd begun to make a few weeks ago when he had first felt the railing in this corner shake under his hand and noted that the concrete that held it was beginning to crumble. One or two of those people might have seen him lunge at her, but they'd believe he was trying to catch her after she started to fall. It would never occur to anyone that he had pushed her.

It was all over now, all behind him—the ridicule, the jealousy, the frustration.

He took a deep breath and felt his heartbeat grow steadier and steadier . . .

NEXT MONTH . . .

Winner of a Second Prize—

STANLEY ELLIN's *The Question My Son Asked*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GEORGE SUMNER ALBEE**

TITLE: ***The Talking Tree***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Constable Cosmos McIntosh

LOCALE: Oturo, Windward Islands

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The blackest man on Oturo, Constable McIntosh had been well trained by the C.I.D.; but what is such training compared with the help of a talking tree?*

OTURO, IN THE WINDWARD ISlands, is very small, very British, and very, very black. And the blackest skin on the island—mused Commissioner Fellowes, who was white but had long ceased to dwell on it—was owned by Constable Cosmos McIntosh, who comprised one-third of his police force. Cosmos was a corporal. The other two policemen, Dyanand Ramdial and Jagdoo Koonhow, were privates.

"Stand easy," said the Commissioner.

Cosmos, in his white sun helmet with the long visors fore and aft, his starched white tunic, his blue trousers with the wide scarlet stripes down the seams, obeyed the command much as a steel I-beam would have. That is to say, he unbent by an amount so small as to be measureable only by micrometer. "Sah," he said, to demonstrate that he was comfortable.

"We have trouble," said the Commissioner. "Mrs. Sranihar Singh died yesterday, and Dr. McIlheny seems to think somebody helped her a bit."

"Och, most lamentable," commented Cosmos.

"You take the word out of my mouth," said the Commissioner wryly. "McIlheny keeps muttering about impossible circumstances. I think he's gone balmy. Get cracking on it, will you?"

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Cosmos saluted, wheeled, and marched out to the courtyard. The police station, fresh and trim in its pale-blue limewash, cool under a scarlet roof of corrugated asbestos, perched on a slope above the harbor. This made it feasible to start a motorcycle engine by coasting down the narrow, twisting street—a fact that Cosmos deeply appreciated, since the kick starter sometimes marred the high polish of his black shoes.

He mounted and rolled augustly down the slope, sounding his beeper for pigs, dogs, and people with equal courtesy, to the sign reading: "Dr. Fergus Figueroa McIlheny, M/D Also Other Degrees, Superlative Treatment of All Known Ails, Fees Consonant With Quality."

The physician, a thin, scholarly octoroon whose freckles matched his hair, behaved like a quack, prescribing lizard soup for the islanders' tizicks because they wanted it that way, but he was a competent surgeon and general practitioner just the same. He received Cosmos in his private morgue, a rear room in which Mrs. Singh was passing her first day of eternal rest under refrigeration.

"This one is a puzzler, Constable," he said. "When they called me, and I got up to the Singh house, the woman was dead. Her lips were cyanotic, and there were hemorrhages of the conjunctivæ, so I insisted on an autopsy."

"Quite right, I'm sure," said Cosmos.

"Yes. The lung tissue shows dilation of the capillaries and veins. There are petechial hemorrhages on the costal, pulmonary, and pericardial pleura, and the venæ cavæ are engorged," continued the doctor, relishing every mouthful. "But here's the puzzle. The woman died of suffocation, asphyxia—yet she *can't* have."

"Why not, sah?" asked Cosmos, notebook in hand.

"Because the room she chose to die in is air-conditioned, and the conditioner was going full blast. It had been on for hours, I'm positive, because the room was still cold even though they'd opened it ten or fifteen minutes before I arrived."

"Did somebody press a pillow over she nose and mouth, den?" asked Cosmos.

"No, she was alone, and she was locked in," said the physician testily. "That's what I was told, at any rate, and I have no reason to disbelieve it. But I can tell you this—Mrs. Singh didn't just lie down and die. I gave her a thorough physical examination only a few days ago, because she was complaining of depression and migraine, and physically she was in the pink. She was a bull-cow of a woman; she weighed sixteen stone. It's murder, Constable—impossible, but murder."

"This be a most serious charge," Cosmos reminded him.

"Do you think I enjoy making it? It is a melancholy reflection for me," concluded the doctor, "that

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in future Sranihar Singh will cease to regard me fondly as his family physician. He pays well, mon."

Cosmos straddled his motorcycle, kicking the starter with care. Bumping over the cobbles of the quay, where a banana boat as white as a new bandage was loading, he rode out of town and took Nutmeg Road up the mountainside. A thousand feet vertically above his starting point, in the first swirls of mist from the rainforest, he parked the machine in front of Sranihar Singh's new pitch-pine mansion, which was painted pickle green with tomato red trim.

Below him the gorges were rank with cocoas and nutmegs, bamboos and flamboyants; a stream flashed; monkeys gossiped beneath the orchids. A tourist would have caught his breath for the beauty of the scene, but Cosmos was far more interested in his opportunity to see the inside of the Singh house, the elegance of which was enchanting.

He knocked. A maid, one of five in view, admitted him.

Sranihar Singh was mourning his departed over a breakfast of paw-paw with lime juice, sea-urchin roe on toast, bacon and eggs, and tea. In his prosperous shop—The Common Folk Own Store, He Give You Long Time Pay—in which he sold everything from galvanized washtubs to illegal narcotics, Mr. Singh was notable for his shy, virginal deportment. There his floorward gaze, his tremulous smile, his fluttering hands proclaimed his humble merchandise to be unworthy of the raggedest customer, to be mere trash upon which he was ashamed to set a price. Here, however, in his grand residence, his drooping fat seemed to have solidified, his multiple chins were held arrogantly high, and his liquid eyes flashed.

Glancing around him, Cosmos did not wonder at the change in manner. What a house! It had fully a dozen rooms, some of which appeared to be as large as eight by ten feet. Such of the rooms as were without louvers were equipped with electric light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, and every room was crammed from wall to wall with furniture imported from the second-hand shops of the United States of America. On Oturo Island a man who wished to exhibit his wealth did not strive to fill his house with beautiful furniture, since all furniture was beautiful, but merely to fill it, period; and Mr. Singh's house was so full that a person could not take a step in any direction without bumping into a straight chair, a reclaimed dining-room suite, or a pedestal lamp with a shade of beaded and fringed silk.

Flanking their breakfasting owner were two refrigerators, painted pickle green to match the exterior of the residence, a cabinet radio, and, wonder of wonders, a television set—not that there were any programs to be seen on it, but what a thing to possess! Och!

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"You wish to see me?" asked Singh, in real or feigned surprise. He did not speak with the island's garbled brogue, a legacy from Scottish sailors; his accent was quasi-Oxford, and impressive.

"Good morning, sah. Yes, sah, I must make a report on de death of your lady," said Cosmos. "I ask your pardon for the necessity at dis time."

Mr. Singh offered his visitor neither chair nor dish of tea. His eyes filled with tears. He drew a silk handkerchief from the pocket of his white sports shirt.

"In my grief," he said, "I was so confused that I gave the doctor permission to perform an autopsy. This is why you are here. He has sent you. He is jealous of me because of my success."

There was a possibility that this was true, island spite-feuds being what they were. Cosmos had already considered it. "Oh, no, sah," he said. "De police must make investigation of all demise, when dey no apparent cause."

"I am a respecter of the law," replied Singh. "What do you want?" His tone was harsh. This is a waste of time, it said, and my time is money.

"De details."

"Come with me." Sranihar Singh, rising, led the way crabwise, pushing aside masses of furniture, to a room so small it offered space only for a narrow iron cot. He switched on the hanging bulb, since the cubicle was without a window, and Cosmos saw that the varnished plywood door hung inward and aslant from its upper hinge, splintered. He noted the air-conditioner built into the rear wall. It was turned off.

"Mrs. Singh was found in here yesterday at sunset." The widower's voice, which was rather shrill, trembled. "She passed with the passing of the day."

"You were de one found her, sah?"

"Not actually. Her niece did. Her niece has been stopping with us on holiday. You will wish to speak with her."

"Aye."

Sranihar Singh clapped pudgy, yellow-palmed hands. A maid balancing a basket of laundry on her head appeared. "Bring Miss Primrose Chi to us," ordered Singh.

Miss Chi took her time about it, but when she arrived she was worth it. She was seventeen or eighteen years old, a Chinese with no visible admixture of African blood, and a girl so perfect of face and form as almost to be mythical. She wore a sheath dress of thinnest turquoise silk, slit to ten inches above the knee. Her toenails, in cobweb sandals with high rhinestone heels, were silvered.

"Tell this policeman how we found Mrs. Singh, my dear," said Sranihar Singh affectionately.

Miss Chi bowed with fragile grace, like a fern bowing to the Trade Winds. "She was napping. I

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knocked to wake her. She did not reply. It frightened me. I called out. Mr. Singh heard me. He came at a run. He kicked down the door."

"De door was jom?" asked Cosmos.

"It was locked," said Singh, adding innocently, "from the inside."

"De inside, sah?" asked Cosmos. Dr. McIlheny had not mentioned this, specifically, although he had said that the woman was locked in.

"Look at the door. I have only first-quality hardware in my house. This lock cost six dollars American. It could be latched from the inside."

"Did Mistress Singh," asked Cosmos, "make de habit of locking sheself in? And if so, why so?"

"The maids chatter like peck-ow birds. Mrs. Singh retired to this room now and then, locking herself in, for a quiet afternoon nap in the cool."

Cosmos turned back to Primrose Chi. "Go on."

"Mrs. Singh was lying on the couch. We tried to wake her. We could not do it. We have a telephone. We called the doctor. He came on his motor tricycle. But he could not wake her, either. Then we knew she was dead."

"Can you tell me aught more?"

"No."

"You, Sranihar Singh?"

"No."

"I shall now inspect de room, please," said Cosmos. "Feel freedom to go about your personal businesses."

Cosmos had been well trained by a C. I. D. detective, and the search he made was thorough. No trap door did he find, however; no board whose nails had been loosened.

After half an hour he cycled back down the mountainside to the police station, pausing on the way to hand a summons to a speeding, careening bus—that is, a truck with benches bolted to it crosswise—appropriately named *Your Heavenly Rest.*

Saluting, he reported his findings.

"We start with an autopsy that doesn't make sense," said Commissioner Fellowes unhappily, "and now we have a locked-room mystery. Blast! You're certain? Stand easy, Cosmos. Do you have to stand to attention every bloody minute?"

"Thank you, sah. I am sartin, sah."

"If Mrs. Singh locked herself in, we jolly well haven't any murder."

"De niece confirm she lock sheself in."

"Is she lying?"

"She young to be so wicked, sah. Maybe. But could dey two kill de lady elsewhere, den left her onto de bed for de doctor? De lady weigh like a schooner of sand."

"They could have managed it, I suppose, if they had to." Commissioner Fellowes stroked the left side of his lean, tanned jaw, then the right. "But, damn it, we haven't a shred of evidence. Not a gleam." He paused again. "You smell something, don't you?"

"I do t'ink it murder, sah."

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"In that locked room?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why?"

"Psychology," said Cosmos, pronouncing it perfectly.

"Oh, come off it," said the Commissioner.

"Five year back, sah, dis Singh mon he living at Walkers,' he got nothing but he fetching smile. He marry de lady ob means, he make money crooked and quick. Now he too big for he breeches, he got de manager-belly, he t'ink he can do how he please and we too slow to cotch him."

"You'll have to give me something better than that."

"Okay, dis niece, dis Primrose Chi, she what de boys call ani-*mal*. She blister a mon like manchineel tree. She put he in Goat Heaven, you know? A Negro lady can have Chinese niece, yes, but dis pretty-pretty ain' no niece, I bet. Singh say yes, but dat when Mrs. Singh, she dead and can't say he falsify."

"Ah-ha," said the Commissioner. "Very well, check on the niece. Meanwhile, I think we've learned all we can from the autopsy. I'll tell Mrs. Singh's relatives they can go ahead with the funeral."

Cosmos had to stand on traffic post for the remainder of the morning, since Oturo Island's automobiles, despite the fact that they numbered only seven all told, had a way of bashing into one another if he did not. But after his midday meal of lambie, coo-coo, and breadfruit salad he visited the Immigration Office.

Miss Chi's entry card revealed that she had come to Oturo by plane from Trinidad and that she was a professional entertainer, a category that might contain a number of sins or none at all. He called the Trinidad police on the short-wave. Trinidad knew Miss Chi well. Yes, she had been a dancer at the Paradise Plume Club until a month earlier, and, yes, one of her admirers had been a middle-aged East Indian with a paunch.

Having learned this much, Cosmos reflected that he had learned nothing. Sranihar Singh was much too shrewd to have told a lie in which he could be so easily caught out. Either Primrose Chi truly was a relative by marriage, or her origins were so dim that Singh was sure nobody could prove she wasn't. In any case it made little difference. A man could fall passionately in love with his wife's niece. Men had been known to fall in love with their mothers-in-law.

Inquiring around town the next morning, Cosmos learned that Mrs. Singh's closest friend had been Mrs. Percival MacGregor, whose husband sailed a decrepit schooner. Mrs. MacGregor, a motherly woman in her fifties, received him barefoot on the verandah of a trim, cobalt-blue cottage twined round and round with a gigantic chalice-lily vine. The yellow flowers were as big as vases. Had the Singh marriage,

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asked Cosmos, been a happy one?

"Mon, no!" replied Mrs. MacGregor vehemently. "She mouth don' taste good, she got a grief-lump in she throat all de day, all de night, dat poor 'oman."

Had there been any talk, asked Cosmos, of a divorce?

No, replied Mrs. MacGregor, Mrs. Singh had been a devout Christian—a deaconess in the church, in fact. Never, never would she have given Singh a divorce. Not that Singh had not pleaded and stormed for one.

"He try to buy he way free. He tell her he gib her de ten thousand dollar she bring him when she marry he. Oh, de mean mon! He pile dat ten thousand into one hundred thousand maybe. He want to keep de change an' keep he sweetie-sweetie too."

"Primrose Chi?"

"She no primrose, mon!" stated Mrs. MacGregor, with a roll of her eyeballs. "She no primrose!"

Leaving Mrs. MacGregor, Cosmos cycled to The Common Folk Own Store, where Singh received him with haughty courtesy, and combed the place assiduously, not forgetting the warehouse out back. It was hardly to be expected that the plump East Indian would leave the murder weapon in plain sight; but on the other hand, if he was egotistical enough to think he was invulnerable, he just might be vain enough to do it.

The shop disclosed nothing. Climbing back onto his motorcycle, Cosmos took the mountain road.

Miss Chi was lounging on the terrace in pale-yellow pajamas, which in the bright sunlight were perhaps more transparent than she knew, tweezing her exquisite eyebrows.

"Good morning," Cosmos greeted her. "Does you plan to return to Trinidad, Miss Chi, may I ask?"

Miss Chi hesitated. "Well—no," she replied.

"You go be dancer here? Dey no night clubs."

"You are embarrassing me," said Primrose Chi. "When Mr. Singh is out of mourning, he is going to marry me."

"Aye?" asked Cosmos. "He say you be Mistress Singh's niece."

"That was just a fib he was telling for my sake, until the final divorce paper came through," said Primrose coolly, "and he could announce our engagement." She bit her pretty lip worriedly. "I wish you would ask Sranihar these questions. He is the one to tell you."

"Ah, he say you not to talk to de police?"

"No, no," said Primrose hastily. "—Sranihar and Mrs. Singh were divorcing—divorced, really. He asked me to come here with him. I came. But then Mrs. Singh would not move out of the house. There was one paper, from the solicitor, she still had to sign. She wouldn't leave until the paper came. I thought it would be only a few days. But she stayed on week after week. Then she

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died. Now we have to wait, Sranihar and I, to show respect."

"Did Mistress Singh tell you she was divorcing?"

"At first she said everything she could to upset me, then she wouldn't speak to me at all."

"Den only Sranihar himself tell you. And you believe he? About de paper and all?"

"He wouldn't tell me anything that wasn't true. He adores me."

"Quite so," agreed Cosmos, and went into the house to examine the air-conditioners.

There were three of them—expensive machines manufactured in England. With the screwdriver attached to his pocketknife he removed the plastic grille from the one in the rear room, but, carefully though he studied the interior, using his torch, he discovered no trace of chemicals in either liquid or powdered form.

Going around to the back of the house, outside, he examined the butt protruding from the wall. It was equally innocent. There were footprints in the soft earth, but they had been left by the builders; there were too many of them.

With a sigh, Cosmos returned to his motorcycle, but instead of going down the mountainside he chugged upward, in low gear, into the rainforest.

Even among the oldest people on the island there were few Oturans who believed any longer in the talking trees. In Cosmos' own generation, indeed, he knew not one boy who had gone into the forest, selected a tree, and sat under it for an hour a day until, after two or three years, the rustling of its leaves had become a language for him, as boys had once done in Africa.

Cosmos himself would have smiled if anyone had asked him if he believed his great-grandfather's silk-cotton tree had any magic. But it was quiet in the cleft between the massive, weirdly shaped roots—they looked like drippings at the base of a tallow candle—and as peaceful as a church. It was a fine *place for thinking.*

His white tunic sodden from the mist, his shoes around his neck, Cosmos made his way up the steep glen and seated himself between the great linenfold roots. He waited until his blood stilled.

Great-grandfather Afuta, he spoke inwardly then, it is much as I thought. The man is so madly infatuated that he was ready to promise the girl money, marriage, anything at all in order to get her to quit her job, where other men could leer at her naked flesh, and come to our island. For the girl, of course, a person of little talent looking ahead to a future of squatting toothless in the marketplace, selling mangos or salt cod, he represented the chance of a lifetime—a rich, doting husband.

But I think she is innocent of the murder. Do you agree? You do. Then it was Singh alone who did it. Now I must determine how.

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I will help you if I can, boy, murmured the tree. *Go on.*

It is the air machine, Great-grandfather. It has to be. Singh fed something into the machine, from outside the house, that suffocated the woman. This much is clear. It did not have to be a poison that killed quickly; the day was a Thursday, the servants' half-holiday; he had all afternoon.

But it has to be a gas, or some substance that turns into a gas. I am not so ignorant of what it was as Sranihar Singh believes me to be. I know it was a gas, I know it had no odor. I know it was something that would kill and then vanish before it could be detected.

Whiteness, sighed the tree.

Disappointed, Cosmos frowned. "Is this your best effort, Great-grandfather?" he asked. "It tells me nothing."

White, insisted the tree, *or whiteness. I am sorry, boy, but in my day we killed honorably, with a cutlass. This is the best I can do.*

The white gleam of the long, low banana ship caught his eye when Cosmos was still high above the harbor. Apologizing to Great-grandfather Afuta for several unkindly thoughts that had passed through his brain, he turned into the quay, beeping his horn in reproof at a naked little boy who was using it for an unseemly purpose, parked his cycle on its tripod, and mounted the gangplank.

A sailor directed him to the refrigeration engineer, a young American with a brush haircut and a friendly grin, who was enjoying a cold bottle of beer in his quarters.

"Have a beer," the young man invited Cosmos. "What can I do for the law this morning?" It was noon.

Cosmos told him.

"Well," said the American, "in this ship it would be a cinch. I could murder everybody aboard by turning a valve. But ashore—you say you think the guy let the air-conditioner suck the junk in from out of doors?"

"I b'lieve so, sah."

"It would have to be a darned small room."

"It smaller dan dis cabin," said Cosmos. "De 'oman she sleeping, sah, on a wee cot."

"Then if I wanted to bump her off I'd buy a big chunk of dry ice and a plastic bag—one of those plastic tarps they use to cover automobiles, say. I'd put the ice in the bag, I'd seal the mouth of the bag around the input of the air-conditioner with adhesive tape. In this climate the stuff would generate gas fast enough to keep the bag from collapsing—if not, I'd prick a few pinholes in the plastic. Carbon dioxide is heavier than air. It would pool on the floor, rising higher and higher. The woman would suffocate in her sleep. But I have two questions. Where would your murderer buy dry ice, here? And why the heck didn't the woman wake up?"

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"De murderer," replied Cosmos, speculating, "import all manner of t'ing; he order what he want from Trinidad or Venezuela. De poor 'oman, so upset, so sad, maybe she nap with sleeping pill from she husband own shop."

"Well, then," said the American, "you've got it made."

Commissioner Fellowes believed in giving credit where credit was due. "Oh, I say," he exclaimed in congratulation, when Cosmos reported. "You've done a wizard job, Cosmos, absolutely wizard!"

Cosmos' broad black chest filled to bursting point with love for his chief. Some day, he vowed, he would find the courage to tell Commissioner Fellowes about the silk-cotton tree.

"But we hab nothing for jury, sah," he said, regretful. "And dis Singh, he no confession mon. He hard as snails."

"He's a bit of a slug, all right. Perhaps we can do something with the girl," said the Commissioner. "I'm not as convinced as you are that she's innocent but, even if she is, she may have seen something. Singh fussing around out back with his contrivance—something like that."

Cosmos was reluctant to bring up psychology again. However, he made a suggestion based on it. "Sah," he said, "talk to she and he together."

"You think that's better? You may be right," acceded the Commissioner. "Very well, get on the phone to them and tell them I want them here at four o'clock."

When the pair arrived at the station, they were not offered chairs. They stood before the Commissioner's long table while the Commissioner himself, in uniform, sat behind it, and it was amazing how this simple disposition turned them into culprits standing accused before the bar of justice. Cosmos took up a post at the Commissioner's left elbow.

"Singh," said Commissioner Fellowes, wasting neither words nor courtesy, "the medical examination shows beyond doubt your wife was asphyxiated. We have no doubt, either, that you asphyxiated her—with carbon dioxide gas?"

Sranihar Singh was badly surprised. For an instant his eyes flickered wildly, but he had himself under control at once. "I can't imagine why you should suspect me of such a dreadful thing," he said. "I am deeply offended, Commissioner."

"The Crown is much more deeply offended than you are," retorted the Commissioner. He went on, "If you used dry ice to make the gas, as you presumably did, either you've been keeping the stuff at the cold storage plant or you bought it on Wednesday or Thursday, from somebody who has reason to keep his mouth shut. We can find your source easily. But it would be quite another matter to convict and hang you, as you well know."

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"My dear Commissioner—"

Fellowes raised a hand. "You've planned cleverly. But what you've overlooked, in your calculations, is that in making them you've also made yourself an undesirable person, and I'm the one who decides who is fit and who is unfit to live on Oturo. By the authority invested in me, I hereby order you to clear off the island within twenty-four hours. And you can be sure a deportation on suspicion of homicide will follow you wherever you go. You're through, old boy."

"Commissioner," cried Singh, wringing his hands, "my shop, my house! Everything I have is here. I can't—"

With a shrug the Commissioner turned to Primrose Chi, who stood directly before him, her slim arms at her sides, in white silk brocade. "As for you, young woman, this scoundrel deceived you from the start. No divorce proceedings were undertaken—I've asked at the Crown Law Office, as you ought to have done long since. No divorce petition has been filed."

Miss Chi raised her eyes: "Sranihar," she asked, "did you do this to me?"

"The solicitor is in Trinidad!" shouted Singh. "I swear it!"

"What is his name, Sranihar?"

"Smith! Gerald Smith!"

Miss Chi laughed shortly. "Gerald was my lover before you. We are still good friends. Don't you think he would have told me?"

"Miss Chi," the Commissioner went on, "I ask you to consider the enormity of what this man did. He introduced you into his home so that his wife, poor creature, would be faced day after day with your youth, your beauty; she would realize she couldn't possibly win out against you. He set out with deliberate cruelty to break her heart and her spirit, to drive her to insanity or suicide. If you go away with him, Primrose, be certain you'll get treatment as cruel when your own beauty fades and a younger girl comes along. And may the Lord help you if you prove stubborn! He'll murder you without a blink, as he did poor Mrs. Singh."

"She told me Singh was making a fool of me," said Primrose Chi. "I would not let myself believe her. I wanted the house and the money. And a car. He promised me a car. I have been stupid. I deserve this. But have no fear, I will not go with a murderer."

Cosmos' eyes had not left Singh's sweating face. On it, now, there appeared such abjectness, such desolation, such degradation as to turn it into a caricature. There are depths of passion to which a man can descend only at the sacrifice of his manhood. Sickened, Cosmos longed to move his glance away, but he did not permit himself to do so.

"Primrose!" cried Singh, "I did it for you! For you, for you!"

"I loathe you," said Miss Chi, "you fat, slobbering hog!"

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Singh snatched at her silken shoulders. "They're taking everything from me. I can't lose you too! I beg you, I entreat you, please don't leave me!"

Primrose wrenched away from him. Raking once, raking twice, she slashed his face with her long, silvered nails. "I am leaving here," she said. "And I am going straight to your wife's brothers. They have banana knives, they have cutlasses. Sleep well, Sranihar."

She left.

Hysterical, Sranihar Singh flung his arms high over his head and turned to the Commissioner. "I demand—" he screamed, and stopped as it occurred to him that murderers were in no moral position to demand police protection. "I'll confess. What do I care? What do I have, now? I'll confess, I'll sign a statement—"

"I must warn you," said the Commissioner formally, "that anything you say may be used against you in court. Constable, fetch your notebook."

But Cosmos did not need to fetch it. It was in the pocket of his crisp white tunic. He whipped it out.

Said Constable Cosmos McIntosh efficiently, "Yes, sah!"

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TALE OF THE PRETERNATURAL

a new story by Margaret Millar

"The second trip seemed a nightmarish imitation of the first: the same moon hung in the sky but it looked smaller now, and paler. The scent of pittosporum was funereally sweet, and the hollow sound of the chimes from inside the house was like an echo in an empty tomb."

THE PEOPLE ACROSS THE CANYON

by MARGARET MILLAR

THE FIRST TIME THE BORTONS realized that someone had moved into the new house across the canyon was one night in May when they saw the rectangular light of a television set shining in the picture window. Marion Borton knew it had to happen eventually, but that didn't make it any easier to accept the idea of neighbors in a part of the country she and Paul had come to consider exclusively their own.

They had discovered the site, had bought six acres, and built the house over the objections of the bank, which didn't like to lend money on unimproved property, and of their friends who thought the Bortons were foolish to move so far out of town. Now other people were discovering the spot, and here and there through the eucalyptus trees and the live oaks, Marion could see half-finished houses.

But it was the house directly across the canyon that bothered her most; she had been dreading this moment ever since the site had been bulldozed the previous summer.

"There goes our privacy." Marion went over and snapped off the television set, a sign to Paul that she had something on her mind which she wanted to transfer to his. The transference, intended to halve the problem, often merely doubled it.

"Well, let's have it," Paul said, trying to conceal his annoyance.

"Have what?"

"Stop kidding around. You don't usually cut off Perry Mason in the middle of a sentence."

"All I said was, there goes our privacy."

"We have plenty left," Paul said.

"You know how sounds carry across the canyon."

"I don't hear any sounds."

"You will. They probably have

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ten or twelve children and a howling dog and a sports car."

"A couple of children wouldn't be so bad—at least, Cathy would have someone to play with."

Cathy was eight, in bed now, and ostensibly asleep, with the night light on and her bedroom door open just a crack.

"She has plenty of playmates at school," Marion said, pulling the drapes across the window so that she wouldn't have to look at the exasperating rectangle of light across the canyon. "Her teacher tells me Cathy gets along with everyone and never causes any trouble. You talk as if she's deprived or something."

"It would be nice if she had more interests, more children of her own age around."

"A lot of things would be nice *if*. I've done my best."

Paul knew it was true. He'd heard her issue dozens of week-end invitations to Cathy's schoolmates. Few of them came to anything. The mothers offered various excuses: poison oak, snakes, mosquitoes in the creek at the bottom of the canyon, the distance of the house from town in case something happened and a doctor was needed in a hurry . . . these excuses, sincere and valid as they were, embittered Marion. "*For heaven's sake, you'd think we lived on the moon or in the middle of a jungle.*"

"I guess a couple of children would be all right," Marion said. "But please, no sports car."

"I'm afraid that's out of our hands."

"Actually, they might even be quite *nice* people."

"Why not? Most people are."

Both Marion and Paul had the comfortable feeling that something had been settled, though neither was quite sure what. Paul went over and turned the television set back on. As he had suspected, it was the doorman who'd killed the night-club owner with a baseball bat, not the blonde dancer or her young husband or the jealous singer.

It was the following Monday that Cathy started to run away.

Marion, ironing in the kitchen and watching a quiz program on the portable set Paul had given her for Christmas, heard the school bus groan to a stop at the top of the driveway. She waited for the front door to open and Cathy to announce in her high thin voice, "I'm home, Mommy."

The door didn't open.

From the kitchen window Marion saw the yellow bus round the sharp curve of the hill like a circus cage full of wild captive children screaming for release.

Marion waited until the end of the program, trying to convince herself that another bus had been added to the route and would come along shortly, or that Cathy had decided to stop off at a friend's house and would telephone any minute. But no other bus appeared, and the telephone remained silent.

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Marion changed into her hiking boots and started off down the canyon, avoiding the scratchy clumps of chapparal and the creepers of poison oak that looked like loganberry vines.

She found Cathy sitting in the middle of the little bridge that Paul had made across the creek out of two fallen eucalyptus trees. Cathy's short plump legs hung over the logs until they almost touched the water. She was absolutely motionless, her face hidden by a straw curtain of hair. Then a single frog croaked a warning of Marion's presence and Cathy responded to the sound as if she was more intimate with nature than adults were, and more alert to its subtle communications of danger.

She stood up quickly, brushing off the back of her dress and drawing aside the curtain of hair to reveal eyes as blue as the periwinkles that hugged the banks of the creek.

"Cathy."

"I was only counting waterbugs while I was waiting. Forty-one."

"Waiting for what?"

"The ten or twelve children, and the dog."

"What ten or twelve chil—" Marion stopped. "I see. You were listening the other night when we thought you were asleep."

"I wasn't listening," Cathy said righteously. "My ears were hearing."

Marion restrained a smile. "Then I wish you'd tell those ears of yours to hear properly. I didn't say the new neighbors have ten or twelve children, I said they *might* have. Actually, it's very unlikely. Not many families are that big these days."

"Do you have to be old to have a big family?"

"Well, you certainly can't be very young."

"I bet people with big families have station wagons so they have room for all the children?"

"The lucky ones do."

Cathy stared down at the thin flow of water carrying fat little minnows down to the sea. Finally she said, "They're too young, and their car is too small."

In spite of her aversion to having new neighbors Marion felt a quickening of interest. "Have you seen them?"

But the little girl seemed deaf, lost in a water world of minnows and dragonflies and tadpoles.

"I asked you a question, Cathy. Did you see the people who just moved in?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Before you came. Their name is Smith."

"How do you know that?"

"I went up to the house to look at things and they said, hello, little girl, what's your name? And I said, Cathy, what's yours? And they said Smith. Then they drove off in the little car."

"You're not supposed to go poking around other people's houses,"

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Marion said brusquely. "And while we're at it, you're not supposed to go anywhere after school without first telling me where you're going and when you'll be back. You know that perfectly well. Now why didn't you come in and report to me after you got off the school bus?"

"I didn't want to."

"That's not a satisfactory answer."

Satisfactory or not, it was the only answer Cathy had. She looked at her mother in silence, then she turned and darted back up the hill to her own house.

After a time Marion followed her, exasperated and a little confused. She hated to punish the child, but she knew she couldn't igore the matter entirely—it was much too serious. While she gave Cathy her graham crackers and orange juice, she told her, reasonably and kindly, that she would have to stay in her room the following day after school by way of learning a lesson.

That night, after Cathy had been tucked in bed, Marion related the incident to Paul. He seemed to take a less serious view of it than Marion, a fact of which the listening child became well aware.

"I'm glad she's getting acquainted with the new people," Paul said. "It shows a certain degree of poise I didn't think she had. She's always been so shy."

"You're surely not condoning her running off without telling me?"

"She didn't run far. All kids do things like that once in a while."

"We don't want to spoil her."

"Cathy's always been so obedient I think she has *us* spoiled. Who knows, she might even teach us a thing or two about going out and making new friends." He realized, from past experience, that this was a very touchy subject. Marion had her house, her garden, her television sets; she didn't seem to want any more of the world than these, and she resented any implication that they were not enough. To ward off an argument he added, "You've done a good job with Cathy. Stop worrying . . . Smith, their name is?"

"Yes."

"Actually, I think it's an excellent sign that Cathy's getting acquainted."

At three the next afternoon the yellow circus cage arrived, released one captive, and rumbled on its way.

"I'm home, Mommy."

"Good girl."

Marion felt guilty at the sight of her: the child had been cooped up in school all day, the weather was so warm and lovely, and besides Paul hadn't thought the incident of the previous afternoon too important.

"I know what," Marion suggested, "let's you and I go down to the creek and count waterbugs."

The offer was a sacrifice for Marion because her favorite quiz program was on and she liked to

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answer the questions along with the contestants. "How about that?"

Cathy knew all about the quiz program; she'd seen it a hundred times, had watched the moving mouths claim her mother's eyes and ears and mind. "I counted the water-bugs yesterday."

"Well, minnows, then."

"You'll scare them away."

"Oh, will I?" Marion laughed self-consciously, rather relieved that Cathy had refused her offer and was clearly and definitely a little guilty about the relief. "Don't you scare them?"

"No. They think I'm another minnow because they're used to me."

"Maybe they could get used to me, too."

"I don't think so."

When Cathy went off down the canyon by herself Marion realized, in a vaguely disturbing way, that the child had politely but firmly rejected her mother's company. It wasn't until dinner time that she found out the reason why.

"The Smiths," Cathy said, "have an Austin-Healey."

Cathy, like most girls, had never shown any interest in cars, and her glib use of the name moved her parents to laughter.

The laughter encouraged Cathy to elaborate. "An Austin-Healey makes a lot of noise—like Daddy's lawn mower."

"I don't think the company would appreciate a commercial from you, young lady," Paul said. "Are the Smiths all moved in?"

"Oh, yes. I helped them."

"Is that a fact? And how did you help them?"

"I sang two songs. And then we danced and danced."

Paul looked half pleased, half puzzled. It wasn't like Cathy to perform willingly in front of people. During the last Christmas concert at the school she'd left the stage in tears and hidden in the cloak room. . . . Well, maybe her shyness was only a phase and she was finally getting over it.

"They must be very nice people," he said, "to take time out from getting settled in a new house to play games with a little girl."

Cathy shook her head. "It wasn't games. It was real dancing—like on Ed Sullivan."

"As good as that, eh?" Paul said, smiling. "Tell me about it."

"Mrs. Smith is a night-club dancer."

Paul's smile faded, and a pulse began to beat in his left temple like a small misplaced heart. "Oh? You're sure about that, Cathy?"

"Yes."

"And what does Mr. Smith do?"

"He's a baseball player."

"You mean that's what he does for a living?" Marion asked. "He doesn't work in an office like Daddy?"

"No, he just plays baseball. He always wears a baseball cap."

"I see. What position does he play

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on the team?" Paul's voice was low.

Cathy looked blank.

"Everybody on a ball team has a special thing to do. What does Mr. Smith do?"

"He's a batter."

"A batter, eh? Well, that's nice. Did he tell you this?"

"Yes."

"Cathy," Paul said, "I know you wouldn't deliberately lie to me, but sometimes you get your facts a little mixed up."

He went on in this vein for some time but Cathy's story remained unshaken: Mrs. Smith was a night-club dancer, Mr. Smith a professional baseball player, they loved children, and they never watched television.

"That, at least, must be a lie," Marion said to Paul later when she saw the rectangular light of the television set shining in the Smiths' picture window. "As for the rest of it, there isn't a night club within fifty miles, or a professional ball club within two hundred."

"She probably misunderstood. It's quite possible that at one time Mrs. Smith was a dancer of sorts and that he played a little baseball."

Cathy, in bed and teetering dizzily on the brink of sleep, wondered if she should tell her parents about the Smiths' child—the one who didn't go to school.

She didn't tell them; Marion found out for herself the next morning after Paul and Cathy had gone. When she pulled back the drapes in the living room and opened the windows she heard the sharp slam of a screen door from across the canyon and saw a small child come out on the patio of the new house. At that distance she couldn't tell whether it was a boy or a girl. Whichever it was, the child was quiet and well behaved; only the occasional slam of the door shook the warm, windless day.

The presence of the child, and the fact that Cathy hadn't mentioned it, gnawed at Marion's mind all day. She questioned Cathy about it as soon as she came home.

"You didn't tell me the Smiths have a child."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't know why not."

"Is it a boy or a girl?"

"Girl."

"How old?"

Cathy thought it over carefully, frowning up at the ceiling. "About ten."

"Doesn't she go to school?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"She doesn't want to."

"That's not a very good reason."

"It is her reason," Cathy said flatly. "Can I go out to play now?"

"I'm not sure you should. You look a little feverish. Come here and let me feel your forehead."

Cathy's forehead was cool and moist, but her cheeks and the bridge of her nose were very pink, almost as if she'd been sunburned.

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"You'd better stay inside," Marion said, "and watch some cartoons."

"I don't like cartoons."

"You used to."

"I like real people."

She means the Smiths, of course, Marion thought as her mouth tightened. "People who dance and play baseball all the time?"

If the sarcasm had any effect on Cathy she didn't show it. After waiting until Marion had become engrossed in her quiz program, Cathy lined up all her dolls in her room and gave a concert for them, to thunderous applause.

"Where are your old Navy binoculars?" Marion asked Paul when she was getting ready for bed.

"Oh, somewhere in the sea chest, I imagine. Why?"

"I want them."

"Not thinking of spying on the neighbors, are you?"

"I'm thinking of just that," Marion said grimly.

The next morning, as soon as she saw the Smith child come out on the patio, Marion went downstairs to the storage room to search through the sea chest. She located the binoculars and was in the act of dusting them off when the telephone started to ring in the living room. She hurried upstairs and said breathlessly, "Hello?"

"Mrs. Borton?"

"Yes."

"This is Miss Park speaking, Cathy's teacher."

Marion had met Miss Park severa times at P.T.A. meetings and report card conferences. She was a large ruddy-faced, and unfailingly cheer ful young woman—the kind, a Paul said, you wouldn't want t live with but who'd be nice to hav around in an emergency. "Hov are you, Miss Park?"

"Oh, fine, thank you, Mrs. Bor ton. I meant to call you yesterda but things were a bit out of hand around here, and I knew there wa no great hurry to check on Cathy she's such a well-behaved littl girl."

Even Miss Park's loud, jovia voice couldn't cover up th ominous sound of the word *check* "I don't think I quite understand Why should you check on Cathy?"

"Purely routine. The school doc tor and the health department lik to keep records on how many case of measles or flu or chicken pox ar going the rounds. Right now i looks like the season for mumps Is Cathy all right?"

"She seemed a little feverish yesterday afternoon when she go home from school, but she acte perfectly normal when she left thi morning."

Miss Park's silence was so pro tracted that Marion became pain fully conscious of things sh wouldn't otherwise have noticed— the weight of the binoculars in he lap, the thud of her own heart beat in her ears. Across the canyo the Smith child was playing quietl

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and alone on the patio. *There is definitely something the matter with that girl*, Marion thought. *Perhaps I'd better not let Cathy go over there any more, she's so imitative.* "Miss Park, are you still on the line? Hello? Hello—"

"I'm here." Miss Park's voice seemed fainter than usual, and less positive. "What time did Cathy leave the house this morning?"

"Eight, as usual."

"Did she take the school bus?"

"Of course. She always does."

"Did you see her get on?"

"I kissed her goodbye at the front door," Marion said. "What's this all about, Miss Park?"

"Cathy hasn't been at school for two days, Mrs. Borton."

"Why, that's absurd, impossible! You must be mistaken." But even as she was speaking the words, Marion was raising the binoculars to her eyes: the little girl on the Smiths' patio had a straw curtain of hair and eyes as blue as the periwinkles along the creek banks.

"Mrs. Borton, I'm not likely to be mistaken about which of my children are in class or not."

"No. No, you're—you're not mistaken, Miss Park. I can see Cathy from here—she's over at the neighbors' house."

"Good. That's a load off my mind."

"Off yours, yes," Marion said. "Not mine."

"Now we mustn't become excited, Mrs. Borton. Don't make too much of this incident before we've had a chance to confer. Suppose you come and talk to me during my lunch hour and bring Cathy along. We'll all have a friendly chat."

But it soon became apparent, even to the optimistic Miss Park, that Cathy didn't intend to take part in any friendly chat. She stood by the window in the classroom, blank-eyed, mute, unresponsive to the simplest questions, refusing to be drawn into any conversation even about her favorite topic, the Smiths. Miss Park finally decided to send Cathy out to play in the schoolyard while she talked to Marion alone.

"Obviously," Miss Park said, enunciating the word very distinctly because it was one of her favorites, "obviously, Cathy's got a crush on this young couple and has concocted a fantasy about belonging to them."

"It's not so obvious what my husband and I are going to do about it."

"Live through it, the same as other parents. Crushes like this are common at Cathy's age. Sometimes the object is a person, a whole family, even a horse. And, of course, to Cathy a night-club dancer and a baseball player must seem very glamorous indeed. Tell me, Mrs. Borton, does she watch television a great deal?"

Marion stiffened. "No more than any other child."

Oh, dear, Miss Park thought

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sadly, *they all do it; the most confirmed addicts are always the most defensive.* "I just wondered," she said. "Cathy likes to sing to herself and I've never heard such a repertoire of television commercials."

"She picks things up very fast."

"Yes. Yes, she does indeed." Miss Park studied her hands which were always a little pale from chalk dust and were even paler now because she was angry—at the child for deceiving her, at Mrs. Borton for brushing aside the television issue, at herself for not preventing, or least anticipating, the current situation, and perhaps most of all at the Smiths who ought to have known better than to allow a child to hang around their house when she should obviously be in school.

"Don't put too much pressure on Cathy about this," she said finally, "until I talk the matter over with the school psychologist. By the way, have you met the Smiths, Mrs. Borton?"

"Not yet," Marion said grimly. "But believe me, I intend to."

"Yes, I think it would be a good idea for you to talk to them and make it clear that they're not to encourage Cathy in this fantasy."

The meeting came sooner than Marion expected.

She waited at the school until classes were dismissed, then she took Cathy into town to do some shopping. She had parked the car and she and Cathy were standing hand in hand at a corner waiting for a traffic light to change; Marion was worried and impatient, Cathy still silent, unresisting, inert, as she had been ever since Marion had called her home from the Smiths' patio.

Suddenly Marion felt the child's hand tighten in a spasm of excitement. Cathy's face had turned so pink it looked ready to explode and with her free hand she was waving violently at two people in a small cream-colored sports car—a very pretty young woman with blonde hair in the driver's seat, and beside her a young man wearing a wide friendly grin and a baseball cap. They both waved back at Cathy just before the lights changed and then the car roared through the intersection.

"The Smiths," Cathy shouted, jumping up and down in a frenzy. "That was the Smiths."

"Sssh, not so loud. People will—"

"But it was the *Smiths!*"

"Hurry up before the light changes."

The child didn't hear. She stood as if rooted to the curb, staring after the cream-colored car.

With a little grunt of impatience Marion picked her up, carried her across the road, and let her down quite roughly on the other side. "There. If you're going to act like a baby, I'll carry you like a baby."

"I saw the Smiths!"

"All right. What are you so excited about? It's not very unusual to meet someone in town whom you know."

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"It's unusual to meet *them*."

"Why?"

"Because it is." The color was fading from Cathy's cheeks, but her eyes still looked bedazzled, quite as if they'd seen a miracle.

"I'm sure they're very unique people," Marion said coldly. "Nevertheless they must shop for groceries like everyone else."

Cathy's answer was a slight shake of her head and a whisper heard only by herself: "No, they don't, never."

When Paul came home from work Cathy was sent to play in the front yard while Marion explained matters to him. He listened with increasing irritation—not so much at Cathy's actions but at the manner in which Marion and Miss Park had handled things. There was too much talking, he said, and too little acting.

"The way you women beat around the bush instead of tackling the situation directly, meeting it head-on—Fantasy life. Fantasy life, my foot! Now we're going over to the Smiths right this minute and talk to them and that will be that. End of fantasy. Period."

"We'd better wait until after dinner. Cathy missed her lunch."

Throughout the meal Cathy was pale and quiet. She ate nothing and spoke only when asked a direct question; but inside herself the conversation was very lively, the dinner a banquet with dancing, and afterward a wild, windy ride in the roofless car . . .

Although the footpath through the canyon provided a shorter route to the Smiths' house, the Bortons decided to go more formally, by car, and to take Cathy with them. Cathy, told to comb her hair and wash her face, protested: "I don't want to go over there."

"Why not?" Paul said. "You were so anxious to spend time with them that you played hooky for two days. Why don't you want to see them now?"

"Because they're not there."

"How do you know?"

"Mrs. Smith told me this morning that they wouldn't be home tonight because she's putting on a show."

"Indeed?" Paul was grim-faced. "Just where does she put on these shows of hers?"

"And Mr. Smith has to play baseball. And after that they're going to see a friend in the hospital who has leukemia."

"Leukemia, eh?" He didn't have to ask how Cathy had found out about such a thing; he'd watched a semi-documentary dealing with it a couple of nights ago. Cathy was supposed to have been sleeping.

"I wonder," he said to Marion when Cathy went to comb her hair, "just how many 'facts' about the Smiths have been borrowed from television."

"Well, I know for myself that they drive a sports car, and Mr. Smith was wearing a baseball cap. And they're both young and good-looking. Young and good-looking

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enough," she added wryly, "to make me feel—well, a little jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Cathy would rather belong to them than to us. It makes me wonder if it's something the Smiths have or something the Bortons don't have."

"Ask her."

"I can't very well—"

"Then I will, dammit," Paul said. And he did.

Cathy merely looked at him innocently. "I don't know. I don't know what you mean."

"Then listen again. Why did you pretend that you were the Smiths' little girl?"

"They asked me to be. They asked me to go with them."

"They actually said, Cathy, will you be our little girl?"

"Yes."

"Well, by heaven, I'll put an end to this nonsense," Paul said, and strode out to the car.

It was twilight when they reached the Smiths' house by way of the narrow, hilly road. The moon, just appearing above the horizon, was on the wane, a chunk bitten out of its side by some giant jaw. A warm dry wind, blowing down the mountain from the desert beyond, carried the sweet scent of pittosporum.

The Smiths' house was dark, and both the front door and the garage were locked. Out of defiance or desperation, Paul pressed the door chime anyway, several times. All three of them could hear it ringing inside, and it seemed to Marion to echo very curiously—as if the carpets and drapes were too thin to muffle the sound vibrations. She would have liked to peer in through the windows and see for herself, but the venetian blinds were closed.

"What's their furniture like?" she asked Cathy.

"Like everybody's."

"I mean, is it new? Does Mrs. Smith tell you not to put your feet on it?"

"No, she never tells me that," Cathy said truthfully. "I want to go home now. I'm tired."

It was while she was putting Cathy to bed that Marion heard Paul call to her from the living room in an urgent voice, "Marion, come here a minute."

She found him standing motionless in the middle of the room, staring across the canyon at the Smiths' place. The rectangular light of the Smiths' television set was shining in the picture window of the room that opened onto the patio at the back of the Smiths' house.

"Either they've come home within the past few minutes," he said, "or they were there all the time. My guess is that they were home when we went over but they didn't want to see us, so they just doused the lights and pretended to be out. Well, it won't work! Come on, we're going back."

"I can't leave Cathy alone. She's already got her pajamas on."

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"Put a bathrobe on her and bring her along. This has gone beyond the point of observing such niceties as correct attire."

"Don't you think we should wait until tomorrow?"

"Hurry up and stop arguing with me."

Cathy, protesting that she was tired and that the Smiths weren't home anyway, was bundled into a bathrobe and carried to the car.

"They're home all right," Paul said. "And by heaven they'd better answer the door this time or I'll break it down."

"That's an absurd way to talk in front of a child," Marion said coldly. "She has enough ideas without hearing—"

"Absurd, is it? Wait and see."

Cathy, listening from the back seat, smiled sleepily. She knew how to get in without breaking anything: ever since the house had been built, the real estate man who'd been trying to sell it always hid the key on a nail underneath the window box.

The second trip seemed a nightmarish imitation of the first: the same moon hung in the sky but it looked smaller now, and paler. The scent of pittosporum was funereally sweet, and the hollow sound of the chimes from inside the house was like an echo in an empty tomb.

"They must be crazy to think they can get away with a trick like this twice in one night," Paul shouted. "Come on, we're going around to the back."

Marion looked a little frightened. "I don't like trespassing on someone else's property."

"They trespassed on our property first."

He glanced down at Cathy. Her eyes were half closed and her face was pearly in the moonlight. He pressed her hand to reassure her that everything was going to be all right and that his anger wasn't directed at her, but she drew away from him and started down the path that led to the back of the house.

Paul clicked on his flashlight and followed her, moving slowly along the unfamiliar terrain. By the time he turned the corner of the house and reached the patio, Cathy was out of sight.

"Cathy," he called. "Where are you? Come back here!"

Marion was looking at him accusingly. "You upset her with that silly threat about breaking down the door. She's probably on her way home through the canyon."

"I'd better go after her."

"She's less likely to get hurt than you are. She knows every inch of the way. Besides, you came here to break down doors. All right, start breaking."

But there was no need to break down anything. The back door opened as soon as Paul rapped on it with his knuckles, and he almost fell into the room.

It was empty except for a small girl wearing a blue bathrobe that matched her eyes.

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Paul said, "Cathy. Cathy, what are you doing here?"

Marion stood with her hand pressed to her mouth to stifle the scream that was rising in her throat. There were no Smiths. The people in the sports car whom Cathy had waved at were just strangers responding to the friendly greeting of a child—had Cathy seen them before, on a previous trip to town? The television set was no more than a contraption rigged up by Cathy herself—an orange crate and an old mirror which caught and reflected the rays of the moon.

In front of it Cathy was standing, facing her own image. "Hello, Mrs. Smith. Here I am, all ready to go."

"Cathy," Marion said in a voice that sounded torn by claws. "What do you see in that mirror?"

"It's not a mirror. It's a television set."

"What — what program are you watching?"

"It's not a program, silly. It's real. It's the Smiths. I'm going away with them to dance and play baseball."

"There are no Smiths," Paul bellowed. "Will you get that through your head? *There are no Smiths!*"

"Yes, there are. I see them."

Marion knelt on the floor beside the child. "Listen to me, Cathy. This is a mirror—only a mirror. It came from Daddy's old bureau and I had it put away in the storage room. That's where you found it, isn't it? And you brought it here and decided to pretend it was a television set, isn't that right? But it's really just a mirror, and the people in it are us—you and Mommy and Daddy."

But even as she looked at her own reflection, Marion saw it beginning to change. She was growing younger, prettier; her hair was becoming lighter and her cotton suit was changing into a dancing dress. And beside her in the mirror, Paul was turning into a stranger, a laughing-eyed young man wearing a baseball cap.

"I'm ready to go now, Mr. Smith," Cathy said, and suddenly all three of them, the Smiths and their little girl, began walking away in the mirror. In a few moments they were no bigger than matchsticks—and then the three of them disappeared, and there was only the moonlight in the glass.

"Cathy," Marion cried. "Come back, Cathy! Please come back!"

Propped up against the door like a dummy, Paul imagined he could hear above his wife's cries the mocking muted roar of a sports car.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL ZUROY**

TITLE: ***Mooney versus Cat***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A trial that Alice might have found "curiouser and curiouser" . . . Meet Magnus Mooney, Man of Many Parts.*

"WELL, CAT," SAID MAGNUS Mooney from his chair, "we're alone. We can now hold your trial." Mooney, a large man who overflowed his belt, stared at the Siamese. The cat on the rug returned the attention with the unblinking blue eyes of its breed. Mooney refilled his glass from the bottle on the table. "Consider me the Prosecuting Attorney," he said, somewhat thickly.

The cat stretched and tucked its paws under its breast.

"Sorry we're short-handed," Mooney apologized. "I'll have to act as Defense Attorney too. And Judge. And Jury. However, I intend to be fair." He took a long swallow of whiskey. His mouth, too small for a man of his bulk, buttoned tightly. He released the pressure with a smack and said, "And if you're found guilty, I'll also be your Executioner."

Mooney worked his fat fingers. "I'll snap your neck before you can twitch. I can promise you a peaceful resting place. Mumford Pond, long ago a quarry, and too deep to be dragged. The body of a boy who once drowned there has never been recovered. If you are sentenced to die, down you'll go, properly weighted—which will be fine for both of us."

Mooney rapped his glass on the table. Whiskey sloshed over. "Court's in session," Mooney announced, rapping again.

Mooney waited. There was silence in the comfortably furnished study. "Prosecuting Attorney," Mooney identified himself, clearing his throat.

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"Cat, you are accused of the heinous crime of pilfering a man's most prized possession. Let us examine the facts. Several years ago, the plaintiff, Magnus Mooney, admitted you into his home as a pet for his wife, Linda.

"Tolerant of his wife's whims, did he not thereafter maintain you in fine style, allowing you all the privileges of his expensive home and grounds, giving you your own room furnished in a manner to delight a feline's heart, even to your own bed with an innerspring mattress, paying for your tender cuts of meat, your imported caviar, your fresh cream, providing you with free medical care, and assuming your costly grooming bills? And how did you repay Mooney for all his generosity? You stabbed him in the back."

Mooney closed his mouth. Then opening it, he roared, "Objection!"

Mooney closed his mouth again. Then he spoke sternly. "Sustained. Prosecution will not presume guilt. That is for the Jury to decide."

Mooney executed a debonair bow in his chair. "Sorry, Your Honor."

The cat shifted its head and its irises took on a red glow.

Mooney's voice crackled. "How did you repay Mooney, cat? Let us go back to a certain night more than two years ago. Mrs. Mooney, an exceptionally lovely human being, a shapely, golden-haired woman with a haunting walk and a naturally affectionate disposition, had just walked in the door after an absence of several weeks on a visit to her family. When lonely Mooney hurried to embrace his wife, did you not scamper between them, thus causing Mrs. Mooney to lavish affection on you first, hugging you, petting you, crooning to you while Mooney waited foolishly with drooping arms? That Mrs. Mooney afterward embraced her husband does not excuse your interference.

"Let us examine your behavior further. Do you recall the occasion when Mooney, having been caught in a sudden rainstorm, arrived home drenched and chilled, anticipating, as was his right, that Mrs. Mooney would make him comfortable, message away the chill with her lovely hands, provide him with warm dry clothing and a hot toddy? Instead, what happened? You so placed yourself that some water from Mooney's hatbrim splashed on you, whereupon Mrs. Mooney, giving her husband a reproachful look and worrying about the few drops on your pelt, rushed you to the bathroom for a toweling while Mooney was forced to make his sodden lonely way upstairs and shift for himself.

"Repeatedly, cat, you have come between Mooney and his wife. Too often, when Mooney, feeling ardent, whispered in Mrs. Mooney's ear, kissed her, fondled her, drifted on velvety clouds, your tail or some other furry or wet portion of your anatomy would insinuate itself between the connubial pair, thus

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causing a most unspeakable shock—at least, to Mooney—and turning even the most violent of passions into miserable ashes. Too often your feline antics have attracted Mrs. Mooney's fond glances and turned her lips cool to her husband. And on the rare occasions when Mooney could persuade his wife to lock you away, did you not invariably emit such grating and blood-curdling howls as to warp Mooney into a sheaf of shredded and vibrating nerves while Mrs. Mooney rushed to soothe your injured sensibilities?

"The Mooneys once took a vacation—Mooney's first break from business in years. Mrs. Mooney wouldn't leave you behind. Can you deny that you turned what was supposed to have been a leisurely tour of the country into an appalling ordeal for said Mooney? Do you remember how your eternal presence in the car kept said Mooney in a morose and snappish mood? Do you recall all the unnecessary stops in deference to your bodily functions and your exercise requirements? Was not Mrs. Mooney as much a nursemaid to you as a companion to her husband?

"Was not the Grand Canyon incident just one of innumerable vexations caused by you? Did you not, just when Mooney was finding a rare relaxation in contemplating the glories of the Canyon, disappear into it? Did not the grieved and worried Mrs. Mooney compel Mooney to hire a mule expedition to search for you in the depths of the Canyon? And when, after much cost to Mooney in time, money, bruises, and exhaustion he finally returned you to his wife's arms, was it not you who received her endearments and caresses, while Mooney got barely a thank-you glance?

"Your Honor, Gentlemen of the Jury, it is needless to submit further evidence. I accuse this cat of stealing an undue share of Linda Mooney's affections. I charge this cat with so occupying Linda Mooney's mind and heart as to have diverted attention, consideration, tenderness, and warmth that should have been wholly Magnus Mooney's. The Prosecution rests."

Mooney filled and emptied his whiskey glass again. The Siamese stretched its long sleek body, and watching Mooney, turned on its side. "I wouldn't act so calm in your place," Mooney warned. "If you ask me, it doesn't look too good for you."

He cleared his throat and identified himself once more. "Attorney for the Defense," he announced. "The Prosecution charges this cat with stealing Mrs. Mooney's affections. A question: Just what sort of affection did Linda Mooney ever have for her husband?"

"Objection!" Mooney shouted. "Irrelevant! Immaterial! It is only important that this cat was a rival for said affection."

Mooney's voice became stern.

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"Overruled. It seems to this court that the past state and nature of Mrs. Mooney's affections is closely linked to the charge. Proceed."

"Thank you, Your Honor. What we intend to establish here is the uncommon nature of those affections, a nature which could in no way be blamed on a cat. As the Prosecution itself has indicated, Mrs. Mooney was always a woman with a tender disposition. What has not yet been made clear is that even before the advent of the defendant she did not confine her affections solely to her husband. Her heart was too generous, too amiable, too easily charmed to be limited to one object. She gave Mooney affection, yes, but also bestowed it liberally, though innocently, everywhere else.

"Do you forget, Mr. Mooney, how you hired private detectives during the early years of your marriage to shadow Mrs. Mooney because you thought that she smiled too readily at other men, because she would squeeze someone's hand or seem to dance too closely or laugh too gaily with others? And when the detectives finally satisfied you that she was completely faithful to you, did you not then realize that your jealousy had no grounds except in her sincere, sweet, and outgoing disposition?

"Then how can you now blame this cat for your wife's temperament, Mr. Mooney?

"Were you jealous of the milkman because she smiled so sweetly at him? Did you bring charges against the tailor's boy because she listened with such interest to his ambitions? Did you indict your neighbor's child because Mrs. Mooney sometimes embraced him? Did you resent the innocent gaiety that Mrs. Mooney shared with all her friends? Would you bring to court the beggars whom Mrs. Mooney could not resist helping? Would you arrest the old men to whom your wife gave up her seat on the train or execute the newspaper dealer who received her cordial 'good mornings'?

"If the court will pardon the drollery, let us not make this cat the goat. You received adequate affection, Mr. Mooney. If you resented sharing it with this cat or any other creature, in all justice keep the blame where it belongs—entirely on your wife's good nature—a nature incapable of undivided devotion. The Defense rests."

The cat began to clean its paws. "Humph!" Mooney said, after a silence. "Pretty tricky lawyer you got, cat. Now it's up to the Jury." He took a stiff drink and fell back in his chair, muttering to himself, lost in thought.

The better part of a half hour passed. At last Mooney sat upright. "Foreman of the Jury," he again announced his identity. "We, the Jury, find the defendant—Not Guilty!"

He grabbed his glass and pounded on the table. "Order! Order! Clear

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the courtroom!" He sank back and regarded the cat. "Well, cat, you got away with it. Right enough, I suppose. The blame actually was all Linda's. It's just that you were the last straw. Lucky for you that I'm a fair man."

Mooney paused thoughtfully. "Supposed to share my wife with the whole damn world, was I? Supposed to say 'Thank you' for the same pat on the head she'd give a cat. Me, Magnus Mooney, a proud man who's got to have all or nothing."

Mooney stared into the cat's blue eyes. Finally he said softly, "But what about Mumford Pond, cat? With its bottom too deep to be dragged? Suppose Linda merely disappeared? What could the law do about it then?"

Suddenly, with a wild sweeping motion, Mooney hurled his glass at the Siamese. The glass shattered against the wall. The cat uttered an outraged yowl and scurried across the room to stop against another wall, watching the man warily.

"Why are you looking so smug, cat? Because you don't have to share the penalty?" Mooney glared. "Why do you sit there so calmly? Why aren't you mewing your heart out? Why aren't you mourning?"

Mooney looked at the clock. It was a few minutes before three in the morning. "As good a time as any," he muttered. "The servants are away and the pond's dark and lonely."

He got up and walked across the room. He said, "I told you that cat didn't really care anything about you, Linda. You see, I was right all along."

Then he picked up the golden-haired, throttled body of his wife, and holding her gently, he carried her to the kitchen and through the connecting door that led to the garage.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **EDGAR PANGBORN**

TITLE: ***Beyond a Reasonable Doubt***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Nearly half of this unusual story is the summing-up by Judge Minton. But as the Governor might have said, the summing-up perhaps did more credit to the Judge's head than to his heart . . .*

VANESSA BRIAN REMEMBERED the day as olive-drab . . . She liked to assign colors to all her moods. Joy was golden flushed with vermilion; blue meant not gloom but peace, resembling summer sky. Passion, conventionally, shone burning-red; and what remained of it for her husband was a beat-out pink, like a much-laundered slip. Only the secret times with Jack Lewes possessed that color of flame.

No mood was black except boredom.

Gazing up into the darkness, she instructed herself: *I will not fidget.* Other unhappy women took sleeping pills: Vanessa Brian would rather not—the bourban nightcap ought to be enough. Yet it was an hour since she'd drunk it, shortly before leaving Clark (who would drink many more) and coming to bed alone. The ghostly hands of her bedside clock stood at half-past midnight.

Clark was alone too. When a drinking spell was on him, he just wouldn't go live it up in a bar like an ordinary man, he preferred to soak slowly all evening, rejecting conversation, holding a book with no pretense of reading it, changing from a Milquetoast into something more blurred, morose, even dangerous. No Milquetoast at the office, she supposed: he understood accounting, and could lick his lips at the spoor of funny business in someone's records. If this was a heavy drinking spell—and on Friday nights Clark faced no

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need to rise early the next day—he might stay downstairs till he passed out on the living-room couch, where she'd find him in the morning, mouth open, clothes ratty, his thinning hair in ugly spikes—a man fallen apart.

Maybe you couldn't speak of "downstairs" in a split-level house. The question had amused Vanessa before. She made a note to try it on Jack if she couldn't get clever about it herself; he'd come through with something sarcastic about suburban living. Best split-level, complete with patio, two-car garage, TV, mortgage, 1864 square feet of lawn —Clark said so, and his IBM mind ought to know—three trees, no dog because Clark was allergic, no children just because. *My possessions! And I* will *stop fidgeting* . . .

She heard or imagined a noise outside her window. Too faint for meaning, it chilled her lightly, almost pleasurably. Whatever unidentifiable night-sounds may amount to, they're not boring. But that noise was surely nothing—only her imagination.

The prowler scare of a week ago must have been her imagination too. Clark had not been drinking that evening. He'd gone out bravely into the June darkness armed with the fireplace poker, but said he couldn't find anything to account for what Vanessa thought she heard—something like a smothered cough. She had been undressing at the time, and the shade was not all the way down. Cat, squirrel, dog, or perhaps nothing at all . . .

Vanessa realized she hadn't pulled the shade down all the way tonight either. One got careless. The house stood on a slope, an open field behind it ending at pine woods. Split-level construction on a slope meant that the bedroom window was as near the ground as the living-room windows on the lower level. A prowler could climb in as easily as peep. But nothing bad (or exciting) ever happened in Simmonsville.

Vanessa sighed her desire for sleep and shifted again toward the wall.

She thought (no aid to sleep): *Thirty-one is still young.* Men on the street still turned their heads, and rowdy ones whistled. Young figure, hair of midnight black, young-ageless face—"Patrician," said Jack Lewes, "Patrician puss with bedroom eyes."

Not only Jack. They'd been turning their heads since she was ten years old. It amused and warmed her now to recall the ludicrous conquest she'd recently made of the new boy at Eckert's Drug Store. Without even trying. His name?—he'd told her, she was sure, among other confidences. First his double-take, then a gaze almost angry, finally a paralyzed shyness with a blush. Then, just because she'd tried to put him at ease with trifling small-talk—oh, a *little* sweet-eye too, but really nothing!—he'd cut loose with practically the story of his life.

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He was going to be a writer, he said, his present job was just a time-passer (this with a stern glance toward the back room where old Mr. Eckert was making up her prescription). His talk became a weird endearing mixture of college-level words and aw-gee.

"Have you written things already?" she had asked.

"Working on a b-book," he had replied, and then had clammed up in defensive reserve. Paul—Paul Hart—that was his name, if it mattered. *Youngsters are so intense!*

Presently she was no longer amused but troubled by the memory, and slightly ashamed. She admitted she had worked a little on the sweet-eye, knowing quite well that adolescents may not understand how little it means. Paul Hart had a brilliant gaze, appallingly direct. Probably a lonely kid, too bookish, too imaginative. She should have known better. Maybe she ought to switch to the other pharmacy. But the poor darling might learn of it and be hurt. *Never mind—I will not FIDGET about THAT! Sleep . . .*

She knew she would find no sleep in the image of Jack Lewes. So why must she now start a drugging reverie which made Jack the cause of that imaginary noise at the window? In her waking dream Jack lifted the sash, strode softly across the carpet. She almost said aloud, "I'm here."

Idiotic! That was not Jack's way. A sneaker-through-windows—huh! . . . From his strong voice, his sleepy-seeming brown eyes, she had known before he even touched her how his massive arms would feel. His voice seemed too loud, but only when others were present. When they were alone together it was only another kind of bodily contact, welcome, with some savor of fear.

At his most loving and tender, something dangerous watched from behind the brown eyes—something alert, perhaps hostile. After all, the pressure about divorcing Clark came from Jack; Jack wanted her for keeps, no doubt of it—

But he wasn't a sneaker-through-windows. Besides, Jack was fifty miles away, near Philadelphia, out there to study the site for a school his firm of architects would build. *I must sleep! The first sheep over is white, the second sheep over is black, and eight times eight is sixty-four and eight times nine is seventy-two and the next sheep over is—black?—and—*

Vanessa did sleep. She did not wake at slight sounds, and they were slight. By grace of chance, there was no actual pain.

The first entry of the knife was at an upward angle from below the bottom rib on the left side, piercing the heart. When her body plunged over in the reflex of shock, a second thrust severed the carotid artery. Vanessa could not have felt any of the later stabs and slashes.

Twenty-nine of them, by count of the Coroner's physician.

"Members of the jury, a judge's

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summing-up is necessarily tedious, but bear with me a while longer, because this laborious weighing of pro and con is exactly the sort of thing you must do yourselves, when you've gone through that door and begun your deliberations in the case of The State against Clark Brian.

"The time of Vanessa Brian's death was between 12:00 midnight and 2:00 in the morning of July second. This is not in dispute. Recall Dr. Macklin's testimony that these times are the outer extremes, and in his opinion, subject to that much possible error, death came at about 1:15 A.M.

"Testimony of the defendant's brother, Philip Brian, was straightforward and not contested. He tried to telephone his brother at Simmonsville Saturday morning with an important message about their father's illness; he got no answer, and came out to the house, arriving about 10:30.

"When he got no answer to the doorbell, though he could see that both cars were in the garage, he tried other means of entry and found all the doors and windows locked. He flagged down a passing State Police car. Troopers Collins and Feinberg did not take his word about the locks but tried them all before forcing the back door. The fact of a locked house is therefore established by three trustworthy witnesses.

"However, the defense has rightly pointed out that the doors have a common type of spring lock. Anyone might have entered in the evening or night and locked the house before leaving, simply by letting one of those spring locks close behind him. In this connection remember Philip Brian's testimony, supported by the neighbors, to the effect that Clark and Vanessa Brian were not much in the habit of locking up. Philip Brian said he usually walked right in after knocking; Mr. and Mrs. Joiner told us they used to do the same.

"The State policemen as well as Philip Brian are witnesses to the discovery of the defendant half dressed, sleeping in an alcoholic stupor on the twin bed beside the one on which his wife lay murdered. His right cheek bore a triangular smear of dried blood, as though the point of a knife had been wiped on it. There was one similar smear on the front of his shirt. Both smears were so located that a knife in his own hand might have made them.

"Trooper Feinberg, in the presence of the others, photographed the defendant while the latter was still asleep, and scraped off samples of both blood smears, which proved on test to be Type O. Clark Brian's blood type is A. His wife's was Type O. These facts are not in dispute.

"The defense has properly asked if you find it credible that a man in this situation would wipe a bloody knife on his face. On his shirt—that might be a natural unconscious motion, but—on his face? I remind you

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of this because it is a point of probability *you* must decide.

"No knife of any kind was found in that bedroom, no bloodstained knife was found anywhere in the house or nearby. But the prosecution demonstrated that a certain carving knife found in the Brians' kitchen precisely fits the shape and size of the smears on Clark Brian's face and shirt. The defense, however, has asked you if a man in a drunken murderous frenzy could possibly have the prudence to wash a knife, put it away, and then return to the bedroom in such a state that he passed out cold and wasn't roused by the doorbell at 10:30 the next morning.

"You have seen that knife in evidence, and the shirt. Bear in mind that careful laboratory tests did not reveal any trace of blood on that or any other knife found in the house. Yet the complete absence of any fingerprints on this particular knife may be significant.

"Remember too that no fingerprints of outsiders were found anywhere in the house, and that other clean knives in the same drawer with that carving knife displayed Vanessa Brian's fingerprints, as one might normally expect—but on the carving knife, none at all. Yet you may argue that when Mrs. Brian last washed that knife and put it away, her prints could have been kept off by a dishcloth.

"Mr. Blair in his closing address for the prosecution also stressed—properly enough, the Court feels—the fact that the defendant is a highly intelligent man, at least theoretically capable of setting a stage with deliberate improbabilities to make his guilt seem unlikely. The Court must remind you once again that if you follow any such line of reasoning, it must satisfy you *beyond a reasonable doubt.*

"This was a bloody crime. In the literal sense. The witnesses who found Clark Brian asleep also established that there was no blood on him except those two smears. But again, recall Dr. Macklin's testimony: all the wounds were in the front of the body except the deep one on the left side that pierced the heart. Dr. Macklin said that death from this wound would have been virtually instantaneous. The body jerked or was pulled over at the time the knife was withdrawn from this wound; it then bled freely, but the blood soaked down into the bed.

"There was no blood on the floor. Remember that: none on the floor, even from the cut—Dr. Macklin said it was almost certainly the second one—which severed the great artery in the throat. You all know a cut artery will spurt, if the heart action is still going on. If that throat wound spurted at all, and there's no proof it did, it did so against the bedclothes, where there was a good deal of blood—but not as much as one would expect from the carotid artery if the heart was still pulsing.

"In other words, members of the

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jury, it is not beyond probability that the murderer might have avoided receiving any stains in the commission of the act. The other multiple injuries, which suggest the work of a sexual psychopath, were all made after death.

"It is the view of the Court that the defense has indicated a plausible case against an outsider, a prowler, likely a psychopath rather than a personal enemy of Vanessa Brian—so far as we know she had none. The fact that she was not sexually assaulted doesn't invalidate this, for that feature may well be absent in such a killing. You must decide whether this hypothetical case, with admittedly no evidence against any individual to support it, is impressive enough to create a reasonable doubt as to the guilt of Clark Brian. Recall that Chief of Detectives Samuel Cutter told you how all known sex offenders in the area were questioned, and released because the police found nothing to connect any one of them with the crime.

"There is agreement among the witnesses as to Clark Brian's words and actions when Trooper Collins finally succeeded in waking him, and the Court ruled this testimony admissible. The defendant appeared to be in a state of confusion, or shock, or both. He said two or three times: 'What a hell of a thing, what a hell of a thing!'

"This was when he first woke, when Trooper Collins was standing between his eyes and the other bed, and Clark Brian could not see his wife's body. Then when Trooper Collins stepped aside, Clark Brian said weakly but clearly, 'In God's name what has happened?' He tried to get out of bed and collapsed in a faint, from which he did not recover until Dr. Macklin arrived and brought him out of it.

"Clark Brian has told you his story on the stand, and held to it with no significant inconsistencies through a rigorous but fair cross-examination. He had known for some weeks, he testified, that his wife was carrying on an affair with an acquaintance of theirs, Mr. Jackson Lewes. Clark Brian loved his wife devotedly, he told us, and had been trying—'in a sort of despair,' to use his own words—to decide what to do. He admitted suffering from what he called obsessive jealousy. He also testified frankly that for some time he had been drinking too much.

"On the night of July first, he said, he had intended to have it out with his wife, being prepared to offer her a divorce if she truly desired it. Instead of doing so, he began drinking after dinner and couldn't get his courage to speak. Vanessa went to bed, he testified, about 11:30. He remained downstairs and continued to drink.

"When at length he got up from his armchair he found, as he put it, that his legs were even drunker than his head. He collapsed on the living-room couch. Some time in

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the night—he said he had no way of fixing the time—he woke, still drunk and rather sick. The living-room light was still on; he remembered turning it off. He testified he could not remember groping his way to the bedroom, but assumed he must have done so. He testified that from the moment of turning off the living-room lamp he can remember nothing until he was wakened by Trooper Collins.

"Mr. Jackson Lewes was called by the State, and cross-examined by Mr. Ferguson for the defense, quite thoroughly. Bear in mind that Mr. Lewes is in no sense on trial here, and the moral issue is not relevant except as it may relate to the motivation of the defendant.

"Mr. Lewes admitted his affair with Vanessa Brian. He testified he had been urging her for some time to ask Clark for a divorce. He expressed great grief for her. Doubtless you noticed that Mr. Lewes, though a very blunt and outspoken man, had nothing to say against Clark Brian. He did refer to the marriage of Clark and Vanessa Brian as a 'mistake,' but this was not said with bitterness toward the defendant. To quote his own words: 'Clark was as bad off as Van—they just couldn't jibe; I should have met her ten years sooner.' When, under the latitude of cross-examination, Mr. Ferguson asked him whether he believed Clark guilty, he said, 'I don't know, therefore refuse to answer.'

"Concerning his own actions on the critical night, Mr. Lewes was equally outspoken. He testified that he was in Philadelphia, but 'doing a pub-crawl,' as he expressed it, in bars where he wasn't known, the names and locations of which he never noticed. He began this at about 10:00 P.M., he said, and got back to his hotel in the small hours.

"The hotel night clerk remembers his return at close to 2:00 A.M. Mr. Lewes volunteered the information that on the night in question he was driving a Jaguar, and he said without being questioned on the point, 'If you want to know could I have made it from Philly to Simmonsville in less than an hour, the answer is yes.' Give this remark whatever weight you think it deserves, if any, in reaching a verdict that satisfies you beyond a reasonable doubt.

"A few words more concerning the possible verdicts—"

"What's the matter, Emma? I'd call it quitting time."

"I'm sorry, Governor, but this came only a little while ago, by special delivery. The Brian case. I wasn't going to bother you, but—"

"Who's consigning me to hell now? Or is it another confession?"

"Well, it is. But this one, sir—"

"Do you know how many we've received to date, Emma? Ten. Those are just the ones sent direct to me *after* the stay I granted him, not counting the ones the police have had to comb out of their hair, and

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not counting the ones sent to me before the stay. I've read and studied them all, and you know I'll read this one; but Emma, when you've been on this job a bit longer, you must learn to sort out the crackpot mail and not let it bother you—these people *always* mail by special delivery. I'll deal with it in the morning, if it has to be dealt with."

"But, sir, the execution is set for eleven tonight—"

"Oh, Lord, so it is! However, my dear girl, I just got through mentioning that he's already had a stay. Don't you see how that could go on forever?—we'll never run out of cranks . . . All right, let me read it."

Your Excellency:

You must immediately grant Clark Brian a Pardon and then do with me as is Fitting, on the understanding—a gentleman's agreement is sufficient—that I am to be allowed Time to finish my Book before I am Burned, or rather not mine since every Word has been dictated by an Author greater than you or me.

I understand now how I may have made an Awful Mistake when I sent Vanesa Brian to Judgement, not having attained that *absolute* Purity one must be in before acting as God's instrument (thus saith the Lord). However, my one conscious Desire was to save her from Sin, but I see now I may have been influenced partly by selfish motives in my struggle against Carnal Lust because the woman Vanesa did tempt and distract me from my Labors on the Book, but may have done so *through no fault of her own!!*

The Book could have saved her but was not ready. I believed there was no way to prevent Sin but What I Did.

Now what I did was let myself be drawn a second time to the Window where she stood wantonly Unclothed, and I believed it was God who spoke and told me What To Do, but may have been the Devil in which case she was innocent of Intent. When her light was out, note that I tried to pray and could not, so afterwhile went around through kitchen window and got knife and did What I Did to her in the dark, her husband asleep in sodden stupor in the living-room.

I put blood on his face for Minor Guilt because God said punish him but *not too much*, so washed the knife and like that and quit job, came here to Cincinnati where you can get me, not working now though was for a while till they were Obviously all against me. I have heard God say Clark Bryan is forgiven, has suffered enough.

Now what the Book does is show people how to avoid Sin. No one ever did so before, religion and philosophy all talk talk talk about sin but *don't tell you what to do!* So you see why I must finish it, now what you must do, only pardon Clark Bryan first, send me telegram General Delivery Cincinnati saying you will grant me time to finish The

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Book, then I send my address and you can come for me.

Please understand, though the Book is still being transmitted to me, I am not *YET* in Purity and *may make another mistake.* There is a young woman across the street, I will take up your time with that now, but understand *I do not want to do it again.* I do not fear Death which is Just, I fear error.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hart

"Mmm—busy subconscious, meant to write 'I will not take up your time,' but it came out affirmative. It's strange, Emma, how sex is almost always the mad-spot in these poor characters. And can't even spell the woman's name with a double *s.* Last name spelled right twice and wrong twice.

"Well, since this has turned up, just let me show you how to evaluate these things, Emma—and please sit down, my dear, don't fidget so. I know it's distressing, but these things come in all the time—you simply mustn't let them throw you. Now, in the first place, notice there isn't a single thing here that the police could use, not one thing he couldn't have got out of the newspapers and undoubtedly did. That's characteristic of all such letters—you can spot it right away.

"And second, take a good long look at this one and only sentence where he tries to deal with the actual facts of the case. I mean here, beginning 'When her light was out —' Why, it's a dead giveaway, the way he stumbles through that part in a big hurry, and even winds up the sentence with Cincinnati and getting another job."

"But Governor, couldn't that be —well, because the facts are too much for him? Emotionally, I mean—"

"You're just letting your heart get the best of you, Emma. Why, you've read some of the other letters. It's exactly the same pattern. They're all sex-mad, and they all want the limelight, and they're nearly all what the doctors call paranoid, like this one. Why, this letter is almost a dead ringer for one —come to think of it, that was before you started to work for me—yes, sir, almost a dead ringer. That one was writing a book too, ghost-writing one for God. Well, it had a small-town postmark—'way out in Nevada—but the police ran it down of course, and do you know what they found, my dear? Surprise, surprise—it wasn't even a man. Poor cracked woman, hermit type, and the neighbors knew to a dead certainty she'd never been East, never been a whole day away from the shack where she lived for nearly fifteen years."

"Goodness! But—"

"Now, Emma, I know what it is that disturbs you about this letter. The obvious sincerity. Such people are sincere, Emma, because they can make themselves believe their own fantasies. Hallucinations, all that—

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don't you see? Believe me, the doctors will catch up with him, if they haven't already—this could easily have been smuggled out of a mental hospital, you know, some well-meaning friend or relative mailing it for him."

"Yes, I see that's possible. But a stay—"

"Emma, my dear, try to look at the way I must: is it any kindness to Clark Brian to grant stay after stay, each one ending with another look at the little door down the corridor? What's *that* going to do to a man's mind? You just can't do that without a serious justification, and this letter—now don't cry, just try to be realistic about it, *please*—this letter provides no such justification. I've seen dozens of them—hundreds—and I believe I know how to tell the real ones from the froth . . .

"Emma, I studied the entire transcript of the Brian case when I granted that stay, and I—feeling better?—and I specially remember how Judge Minton bore down on the doctrine of reasonable doubt. I talked with him too, and he shared my opinion that the verdict was correct. In other words, though the good Judge wouldn't so express himself, Clark Brian is guilty: he got drunk and butchered his wife, and then with his goof story about not remembering, he wrecked his chances of a second-degree finding. Reasonable doubt, yes, but your trouble, Emma, is *un*reasonable doubt—which does credit to your heart but not to your head. Yes, that's it—*un*reasonable doubt. Now then, you run along home and get a good night's sleep."

"Well, I—"

"That's right. Good night, Emma."

He strengthened his Will by leaving his light off and his shade raised, but not allowing himself one glance toward the bright shameless window across the street until the luminous hands of his alarm clock had overtaken the hour of eleven and left it behind in the desolation of past time.

And no one came.

He remembered then with shock that he had not written in his letter about the mole under her left breast. It was evidence. It proved he had been there. How could he have forgotten such a thing?

At midnight he touched the dial of his portable radio. The light across the street went out. The news broadcaster sounded healthy and solemn: "An hour ago Clark Brian paid the supreme—"

Paul Hart struck the radio with his fist, toppling it to the floor where it died with a squawk and a tinkle of smashed parts. He said aloud once, "Isn't anyone ever going to help me?"

And no one came.

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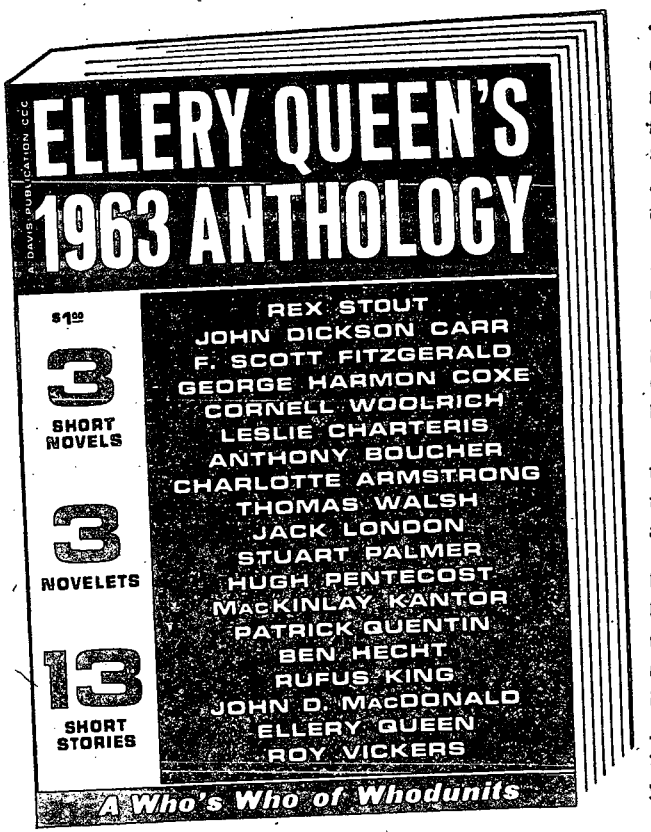

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

Not-quite-mystery-novels, but certain to interest most readers of crime-suspense, are two recent courtroom novels which capture much of the fascination of actual trial transcripts: Dick Pearce's THE EDGE OF EDEN (Lippincott, $4.95), dealing with murder in a curious idealist social experiment, and Peter Packer's THE LOVE THIEVES (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $4.95), a careful recreation of the still-unsolved and glamorous Starr Faithfull case in 1931. For real-life trials superbly reported, see two important reprints: Edward D. Radin's LIZZIE BORDEN: THE UNTOLD STORY (Dell 4886, 50¢) and Sybille Bedford's THE TRIAL OF DR. ADAMS (Black Cat BA-21, 50¢).

★★★★ **THE WILL OF THE TRIBE, *by Arthur W. Upfield*** (Crime Club, $3.50)

One of the best Upfields, with the incomparable Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte in top form as he contends with a puzzle of Australian topography and several levels of aboriginal culture. And see also the revival of DEATH OF A SWAGMAN (1945; British Book Centre, $3.25).

★★★ **COUNTERWEIGHT, *by Daniel Broun*** (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, $3.50)

Veteran stage manager turns novelist with the only Edgar-worthy first of the year to date: a shrewd and lively look at show business (and murder) from the fresh viewpoint of the backstage crew.

★★★ **THE CRABTREE AFFAIR, *by Michael Innes*** (Dodd, Mead, $3.50)

Quiet, leisurely, civilized tale of Sir John Appleby, murder, and a background of Eighteenth Century canals and architecture.

★★★ **THE EVIL WISH, *by Jean Potts*** (Scribner's, $3.50)

Tense drama of murder planned, frustrated and pending, with acute insight into its two deadly heroines.

Your attention is directed to the new series of Ace Double-Books (50¢ each), which has been offering pairs of novels by some of America's most subtle and commanding women writers, often neglected by paperback publishers. Authors so far represented include Charlotte Armstrong, Ursula Curtiss, Doris Miles Disney, Ruth Fenisong and Elisabeth Sanxay Holding —an impressive array, as terrible as an army with banners.

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a new story by

VERONICA PARKER JOHNS

Green Goose Chase

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	VERONICA PARKER JOHNS
TITLE:	*Green Goose Chase*
TYPE:	Crime and Detection
LOCALE:	New York City
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Meet Maribel, a terrestrial mermaid, a Village sea sprite, a cherub of a sunken cathedral—in a word, a kook . . . and a refreshing change of pace.*

I HAVE ALWAYS PRIDED MYSELF ON my ability to judge character and to forecast behavior. It's a game I play on buses and in doctors' offices, studying my co-riders and co-patients, trying to determine by gestures or some seemingly irrelevant item of apparel what manner of human this is.

I have been able to size up new acquaintances on sight, and decide whether or not I want to know them. Thus have I avoided being saddled with bores, with sniveling self-pitiers, and with the careless who get themselves involved in scrapes and drag you in with them. However, I must admit the game is getting more difficult all the time.

For one thing, the world has widened. Not just *THE WORLD*, although that, too, has spread in one sense while shrinking in another. I mean the lower-case sphere in which one moves and has her being. In another era I would not even have met the Joneses, an impoverished artist and his model wife—no pun intended—who lived in a loft. I have come no closer than a first-tier box at *La Boheme* to such a ménage.

Nor would Dexter Tuthill have been in a position to introduce me to them. The son of my dearest chum, the scion of a family of substance, would not have evolved into a floor-sitting, bongo-beating buddy of beatniks. In my day a boy like

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that might have got a crush on a married model, but he would *never*, even in his cups, have told his mother's best friend about it. Boundaries dissolve, battlements of decorum totter, and sometimes a body doesn't know which end is up.

Dexter doesn't remember telling me how he feels about Maribel. (In my day "Maribel" would have been the name of a seaside resort, not of a girl.) He drew a blank, after wolfing a bottle of my best brandy, and thereafter returned to describing her as one of a couple I *must* meet. The better half, perhaps, but only a fraction—not, as he had revealed, the green-eyed, Undine-haired sea witch who had boxed him out of his mind.

Speaking of minds, the aging of mine may slow up my reflexes. Not that I'm verging on senility, but the thought processes are less agile than they used to be. Things come at one faster nowadays than I am able to handle them. That's why I have taken to setting all the facts down like this so that I may peruse them at leisure, as though they were incidents in a story by an author bent on tricking me. If I have wildly mistaken a person's character, credited him with qualities he does not possess or overlooked sore thumbs, I can later locate the point at which I got off on the wrong foot. Fortunately, I have total recall.

Another hazard of present-day people-watching is that the fauna act unfairly. How can one sniff out a guilty secret in someone capable of neither shame nor reticence? Very little now lies beyond the pale. Offenses for which one was once drummed out of regiments don't provoke a bongo-beat in this day and age. And that is positively the last excuse I will make for myself.

So, to take a stab at making a long story short, I finally agreed to visit the Joneses with Dexter. "They live in a chic warehouse district," he warned me. "Don't wear your diamonds, Kitty." In my day his greatest liberty would have been to call me Aunt Kathryn.

The cab driver was certain we had given him the wrong address.

"That's all business property down there," he argued. "They pull in the sidewalks at night."

Dexter stuck to his guns, saying that more people than the zoning authorities dreamed of lived in business-only areas. Artists, he had briefed me, need light and space that is not available in what are laughingly called Studio Apartments, and they did not mind breaking a law or two to satisfy these needs.

As a matter of fact, he had purposely given the driver a wrong address. The Joneses were actually domiciled three blocks south of where we disembarked. This was part of the cloak-and-dagger bit, Dexter said. Had he learned the true house number, the hackie might have ratted. I had conversed with Dexter often enough to comprehend his lingo, even to employ it

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occasionally myself for shock value.

On the next street was one of those islands of light which dot dark portions of the city. It was what Dexter calls a Greasy Spoon, jumping with jukebox jive, jam-packed like a waterhole in the jungle with nocturnal animals whose lairs were in the peripheral gloom. We trudged onward until he breathed, in wonderment, "There she is."

There she was, indeed, in the dingy spotlight of a street lamp. The hair flowing over her shoulders seemed the palest green. She looked like a child, a lovely, submerged child, a cherub of a sunken cathedral.

I thought his wonderment was at the beholding of her, that chronic shock of surprise one gets at the sight of a truly beloved. Things were so different here in Wonderland that I assumed hostesses always met guests in the street, to guide them through labyrinths with gossamer threads.

That was my first mistake. This particular labyrinth was Liberty Hall, and I was later to learn that Dexter had a key to it. Maribel immediately began to apologize. (Or was the first thing she said, "I'd have known you anywhere from Dexter's description"? That opener always floors me, since I'm never sure whether it is complimentary or captious.)

I don't know when I first noticed that she was carrying a shopping bag. That should have alerted me, have set me to wondering why she was either coming or going instead of standing pat, basting a turkey. If things were on schedule, she should have been slaving over a hot stove. Dexter vowed she was a marvelous cook. Contradiction Number One: this sea sprite did not look as though she could boil water.

But I did not guess that our plans were changed utterly. I had to learn it from her luscious lips as we began to retrace our steps. Jones was in one of his moods, and Dexter could tell me what *that* meant. Jones, in a mood, could wither you at twenty paces. The only thing for it was to leave him alone, as he chose to be, and go elsewhere.

I was disappointed and annoyed. I had forsaken my hearth to make this Godforsaken trek solely to satisfy my curiosity. I yearned to view the interior of that bizarre habitat, to witness its alleged marvels—the poodle who could do everything but talk, the comfort of its cushions, the come-hither that was dispensed with cocktails.

And, of course, Jones's talent as a painter. This had always been tacit. Ostensibly, Dexter was bringing us together because he believed we were incipent soulmates—but I wasn't born yesterday. I knew he was aware that I am a minor-league patron of the arts and might be able to give Jones's career a push upward.

But it was not to be. Not ever. Wild horses could not drag me thisaway again, and there was no point whatsoever to my being here to-

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night, at the whim of an inhospitable churl who had slammed the door in my face.

Maribel was still apologizing. "I wish I could take you to a swank place, "but I can't afford it."

Was this a touch? Was I being brainwashed into suggesting we hop a cab and go to Twenty-one on my Diners' Club Card? I hoped not. Maribel wasn't wearing shoes.

"I left a gorgeous dinner in the oven," she wailed. "Oh, mercy me!" She stopped in her tracks, braking herself with her manicured toes. "I can't remember whether I remembered to set the alarm."

My first thought was that it was rather early in the evening to be worrying about getting up the next morning. Then I yanked myself into the twentieth century and conceded that there were gadgets used in cooking to remove all guesswork. I felt a pang of pity for the turkey which would presently make its bow, with no one to welcome it but a grouch.

"Did I, or didn't I?" Maribel pondered. "Would you be a lamb, Dexter, and check? And take a good look round to see if I neglected any other little detail."

He nearly stumbled in his zeal to do her bidding. It didn't occur to me to question how he proposed to get in, to storm the fortress of the ogre.

"I'm such a scatterbrain," Maribel confessed needlessly. "Dexter is always having to pick up loose ends for me."

He would weary of it, I prophesied silently. I knew his background. If wishes came true, if Mr. Jones should no longer exist as an impediment. Dexter would eventually revert to type. Insouciance may be all very well in the wild-oat stage, but there comes a time when a Tuthill likes his pipe and slippers where they ought to be.

Maribel was rummaging in her shopping bag. No shoon, no socksies, but she was wearing gloves, dainty white-kid gloves which bore no relationship to the rough cotton of her costume. "I forgot to throw out the garbage," she said, hauling up a newspaper-wrapped package tied with knotted string.

Her purse slipped from under her arm, scattering its contents on the sidewalk. "Allow me," I volunteered, taking the bundle from her. It was heavier than I expected, might have been accumulating for days. "Is there a trash receptacle nearby?" I asked.

"The kids steal them," she said, giving me a rough idea of her neighbors. "Just throw it in that empty building. Everybody does."

Everybody didn't, in my day. Nevertheless, when in Rome . . . I certainly wasn't going to tote it wherever we were going.

By coincidence, we were going to an Italian restaurant, I learned when Dexter had rejoined us. Everything was hunkydory *chez* Jones, he assured the lady of the house. She said she hoped I liked that kind of food.

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"I'm mad about it," I gushed, trying to put a jolly face on the fiasco. "I always travel on the Italian line so that I can gourmandize."

I wished myself on the deck of the *Roma* that very minute, watching the dolphins leap—or were they mermaids who looked like Maribel? We detoured around an iceberg, which was actually a drunk lolling in the gutter. I heard a bell jangling somewhere, like a call to lifeboat stations. Nearer my God to Thee, I thought, changing ships in mid-ocean.

Maribel braked herself again. "Is that ours?" she asked. "So early?"

"I don't think so," said Dexter. "It's probably the seven-thirty mouse on another track."

He proceeded to explain this cryptic remark to me. Not only wasn't the living easy in these parts, but business hadn't been too good either. All the burglar alarms were obsolete and as jumpy as old maids; even mice, on their nightly rounds, could set them to chattering. As a consequence, the police paid them no mind, unless one was specifically called to their attention.

"Are there many real robberies hereabouts?" I asked falteringly. A great many, I was told. Burglars swarmed over the roofs practically incessantly. Top floors, such as the Joneses were privileged to have, were the most vulnerable. Their place had been broken into no less than four times. That was why they had bought the poodle, who turned out to be a flop as a watchdog since he was hospitable.

"The ironical thing," said Maribel," is that there is a really good burglar alarm in our building. The Better Buttonhole Company, which occupies the first two stories, has a fine one. Our thieves didn't go far enough downstairs to ring it, and it wouldn't have mattered anyway—the police wouldn't have come unless someone phoned in to them. It sounds just like all the others."

"That's outrageous," I said. "I should think people would be stealing better buttonholes all the time."

"And it's a nuisance for us," she added. "The wires are strung along the stairs, through the halls. To avoid setting it off whenever we go in or out, we have to flip a switch at the top and bottom. That's what I couldn't remember doing—whether I'd flipped the switch inside the door, turning it on, when I left."

So that was the kind of alarm she had meant, not one pertaining to the cooking of a turkey. Mr. Jones would just have to shift for himself in the culinary department.

We had now reached the place where we were to have our substitute dinner. As instinct had already told me, it was the waterhole I had seen earlier. The animals were restive. The males wore beards, the females were all shoeless. The spaghetti was edible, although I managed to leave enough on my plate to conceal the meatballs. The *espresso* coffee was superb.

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Maribel reminded me that I held a raincheck for a meal at her home. I faithlessly promised to return, admitting that I had rather looked forward to that turkey.

It wasn't turkey, she contradicted. It was a green goose languishing in the oven. Did I know about green geese?

I nodded, but she told me anyway, seemingly eager to flaunt her familiarity with the exotic: "It's a cross between a wild goose and a tame one. You have to cook it just right or it tastes gamey."

"I haven't had one in years," I mused greedily. I imagine the spaghetti had left a few empty spots now clamoring for crackling green goose. "I wonder if my market carries them."

"If it doesn't," said Dexter, "try Maribel's. Bruno's on Thomas Street."

She glowered at him, muttering, "Blabbermouth!" Obviously she was one of those women who don't like to share their trade secrets with others. Bruno must be a perfectly fabulous butcher whom she wanted to keep strictly for herself. It seemed unlikely that I should ever attempt to come between them.

Save for that outburst, she was charm itself while he dallied at the Greasy Spoon. She was certainly a pretty little thing. Her hair wasn't any more green than a green goose is, but was a shade never before seen on man or beast. Sort of an off-white is the nearest I can come to it.

The length of our dalliance was due only partly to the pokey service. I felt that Maribel was deliberately dawdling over her food, giving herself plenty of time in which to win me over. She very nearly succeeded.

We sipped Strega with our coffee, and I protested when Dexter ordered a third for himself. However much noblesse obliged, I could not endure that uncomfortable bench one second longer.

"Hold your horses, Kitty," he said. "I'm fixing to drive you home in style. Did you ever ride in a hot-rod?"

I told him I had been spared that experience.

"Well, you make your maiden trip tonight. We'll never find a cab down here, so I'll just ring up a hot-rodding pal and ask him to pick us up. I can reach him at his pad," he looked at his watch, "in about twenty minutes. It'll take him ten to get here. Can you hold out that long?"

I said I'd try. My legs were completely numb when he borrowed a dime and went to call his friend. To distract me, Maribel rattled on about this and that, jumping like a will-o'-the-wisp from one subject to another. She seemed incapable of making a logical plan and following it through. I thought it was well that she didn't wear shoes as she would never get either on the proper foot.

I could have boxed Dexter's ears when I learned he'd told his friend to

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meet us in front of Maribel's instead of at the restaurant. We hit the sordid trail back there and found a big surprise at the end of it.

The narrow street was gorged with squad cars and emergency vehicles, and was bristling with cops. One of the latter held a squirming poodle who leaped from his arms at the sight of Maribel. The drunk around whom we had detoured earlier was propped against a wall, beaming like a hero. I supposed he had reported the alarm, which had not been triggered by the nine o'clock mouse but by the fifth burglar—who was also a murderer.

Mr. Jones had been hacked to death before his easel. His wife, passed out cold on the sidewalk, looked no more alive.

I don't know whether Dexter's hot-rodder ever showed up. I accepted a ride home with a very nice sergeant, after answering a few questions about the events of the evening in which I was personally involved. I'm afraid I was able to shed little light on the crime.

My interrogators seemed to be particularly concerned with the time element, wanting to know precisely when Jones had last been seen alive. When I explained that I had never seen him in any condition they promptly lost interest in me.

Nevertheless, I was mentioned in the *Times* the next morning. I was described as "elderly and respectable," with which few would quibble.

My maid brought in a less austere journal which gave the story a bigger play. It ran a picture of Maribel, remarking how fortunate it was that this lovely had been spared the killer's savagery. She had left her flat at seven, to keep a rendezvous with her guests in the street. She wanted to intercept them, she said, forestalling the long climb for one of them who had a heart condition.

She wasn't referring to me. Mine's as sound as a dollar. Dexter has a heart condition, all right, and it murmurs "Maribel."

The report from the Medical Examiner indicated that she had become a widow quite early in the evening—that she had, in fact, got out of there in just about the nick. That chilled me. Dexter must have missed the brigand by mere seconds. That perilous visit was not touched on in the article.

Instead of the proverbial dull instrument, the murder weapon was said to be exceedingly sharp, somewhat hefty, and missing. A thorough search for it had proved fruitless, and it was assumed that the murderer had taken it with him when he fled. I wondered if the hunt had included the oven. It seemed odd that this vivid writer had not wallowed in the pathos of the abandoned green goose.

The drunk, who had acted like the man who brought the message to Garcia, was actually a pretty small link in the chain of events. He had been rudely awakened from a snooze on the stoop, not by the burglar

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alarm which was normal background music in those parts, but by the anguished howling of a dog. A veritable St. Francis of Assisi, he had thrown his hulk against the door, breaking the lock. Liberated, out scampered Jones' poodle, carrying its leash in its mouth, rolling its eyes heavenward. That egress also proved to be in the positive nick.

The drunk was known to the police as a kindly old codger with a clean record and they did not consider him a suspect. They found him sitting on the curb, amiably chatting with the dog, when they arrived in response to a telephoned report.

Dexter called around noon to announce that he was in a bind. Maribel had sought refuge in a Y.W. instead of an S.P.C.A. and therefore had had to find other digs for Gaston, the poodle. Dexter had taken him to his own place last night, only to discover that his roommate was allergic. I saw it coming and didn't even try to duck, being almost as Assisian as the drunk. I promised to harbor the waif until Maribel found an apartment. She no longer required a north light, and the loft was rife with redolent memories.

They delivered my house guest on their way to have dinner with friends. Their narrow escape from death seemed not to have awed them in the slightest, and their responsibility was plainly showing. I do think Maribel, even if her husband had been an absolute stinker, should have tried to look at least a trifle more bereaved.

Gaston, on the other paw, was a model of decorum. I almost forgot he was in the house until he howled to be let out of it. I live in a duplex, and he had been there little more than an hour before he had memorized the layout. At what he deemed the proper time, he trotted out of the upstairs sitting room and made a beeline for the door to the outside world, having stopped on the way to pick up his leash from a chair. Smart critter!

I had been dogless since Petit Chou died, and had become reconciled to my loss. Nevertheless, by the following morning I was prepared to make his mistress a generous offer for this paragon of canine virtues.

There was nothing in either the *Times* or the tabloid about *l'affaire* Jones. Apparently, this was what is depressingly referred to as "a routine murder." Its sole distinction was Maribel's beauty, which had been duly exploited by a picture and a sob story. Her sudden assumption of widowhood had been a one-day wonder only. I hoped the police would stick with it a little longer.

I don't know just when I began to get a hankering for green goose, but by the middle of the day it was irresistible. I took Gaston with me and he behaved beautifully all the way down in the cab. Maribel's

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butcher was even farther into alien territory than her erstwhile abode. I told the driver to wait.

"I'm a friend of Mrs. Jones'," was the asinine announcement I made as I entered the shop. They might have a dozen customers of that name. They could not pinpoint the one I knew.

"You *must* know her," I insisted. "A very pretty girl with long, sort of whitish hair?"

"I bet she means the Kook," the assistant said. "Sure, she does. That's the Kook's dog with her."

The proprietor figuratively washed his hands of me and went to another customer. Maribel's name, I gathered, dropped here with a hollow thud; it was no Open Sesame to obtain the choicer cuts.

"I'd like a green goose, if you please," I said.

"A green what?" he asked blankly.

"Goose. Such as you sold Mrs. Jones earlier in the week."

"We didn't sell her nothing green, Ma'am. If she bought spoiled meat, she got it somewhere else. She buys most of her stuff somewhere else, unless she's one of them vegetarians. Here she don't get nothing but stuff for the dog—hearts, tripe, lungs, like that. And she's more trouble than she's worth."

In my day one did not discuss acquaintances with tradespeople, so I kept quiet. He was doing all right alone.

"What a kook! Spending less than a buck but wanting service like at the Ritz. 'Cut it up real fine,' she says. She ain't got no knives sharp enough to do the job, so we must do it here. I get fed up, so a few weeks back I tell her to do it herself. I furnish the tools, but she's got to handle her own kookie business.

"Then what happens? I get blamed! When the boss finds it's missing he takes it out of my salary. He even accuses me of taking it myself—"

"Sure, you took it," said the boss, joining the fray. He turned to me, saying sadly, "You can't buy those kind no more. It came from the old country. All these young punks figure on going in business for themselves and they rob you blind to furnish their store—"

"I quit!" The helper took matters into his own hands, tearing off his bloody apron and stomping on it. "How many times do I have to tell you that I didn't take your damn, blasted cleaver?"

They were both shouting as I beat a hasty retreat. Despite the haste, I sat in the cab several minutes before telling the driver where to go.

I was not wholly surprised. I now freely admitted to myself that I had not come down here on a green goose chase but in response to a craving to learn more of Maribel. But I had not anticipated so stunning a jackpot.

I'd been so wrong about Dexter. I'd thought he was basically fastidious and was indulging in this slumming as a protest against his tend-

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ency to conform. I thought he was essentially timid, almost a milquetoast, yet he had not batted an eye when he came down from that room.

And Maribel. Scatterbrained? Like a fox! She had meticulously constructed the perfect crime, and but for a fluke would have achieved it. She had not foreseen that I would pad my part, would not be content with the role she had assigned to me —that of alibi-sustainer and built-in character witness.

I told the driver to take me to the nearest police station, hoping the police would be better judges of character than I proved to be. They would have only my word that it was purest accident that my fingerprints were on the package to which I would direct them. Maribel had worn gloves when she handled it, had probably done so before when she used what was in it to kill her husband.

Gaston yawned.

"Don't look so unconcerned," I said, piecing out his part in it. The conspirators had left the door to the loft open, relying on this creature of habit to run downstairs around nine o'clock and set off the alarm. Dexter could phone the police from the restaurant and state with certainty that it was ringing. "You're as much an accessory after the fact as I am."

So help me, he winked and offered his paw.

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THE LAST ANSWER

by HAL ELLSON

DOWNTOWN IS A TOMB AFTER six o'clock. Come up from the subway at midnight and you can walk for blocks through the side streets and meet no one—not a single soul.

Broadway isn't much different—a little traffic, a few pedestrians, dark brooding buildings, with a light here and there where a cleaning woman is doing her chores.

Strickland stopped off at Carey's Bar. It was quiet there—a few office workers drinking. He ordered—all he wanted was a quick one, but a great deal of work waited for him at the office and the night was hot. So he had another, then a third before he stepped outside.

Immediately he was made aware of the buildings towering over Broadway, somber and silent, yet neither dead nor asleep; with a thousand shadowed eyes they kept watch over the street.

Strickland turned into a narrow side street, his shadow stretched before him enormously, his footsteps echoing. He came to the building where he worked, and entered. The lobby was empty, and the single elevator door was open.

He walked to it, expecting to be greeted by sleepy-eyed Pat. Instead, a new operator was there, standing stiffly at attention, at 12:30 on a hot night in an almost empty building.

"Floor, please?"

Strickland almost laughed, then caught himself. "Thirteen," he answered.

The door closed abruptly, and the car shot upward at full speed, while the new operator stood at attention, ramrod-straight. Another misplaced General, Strickland thought, and on a sweltering night like this.

The car halted at the thirteenth floor. The operator reached out to open the door, stopped his hand, and turned. His eyes were like two black stones, his face a pale mask.

"Well, aren't you going to open the door?" Strickland asked.

"A question, sir."

"Let's have it."

"Are you for freedom or for slavery?"

Strickland wanted to laugh, but the man was dead-serious, waiting, impatience smoldering in his black eyes.

He's either drunk or crazy, Strickland decided, no longer amused by the situation he found himself in—alone, thirteen floors up in an elevator with this strange character. He stared back at the man, wondering which side he favored. To give the wrong answer might—

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"I'm for freedom," Strickland answered.

"The correct answer," said the operator, abruptly opening the door.

Strickland stepped out and went down the dim hall to his office. He was somewhat ruffled by the incident. I wonder what would have happened, he thought, if I hadn't given the right answer. . .

An hour later the elevator door opened on the thirteenth floor. Strickland heard it from his private office, then heard footsteps on the marble floor. He raised his head, wondering. It was too early for the night watchman to be passing through.

The office door opened and closed. Strickland turned in his swivel chair and waited. A shadow darkened the frosted glass of the door.

"Who's that?" Strickland asked.

The door swung open, and there stood the elevator man. "I hope you're not too busy," he said.

"I've a report to finish by morning, but what is it?"

"Another question, sir."

Strickland wanted to order the fellow out, but he restrained himself. Obviously this fool was drunk. He had to be, and it would be better to humor him. "All right, what's the question?"

"Are you for truth or for lies?"

"For truth," Strickland said quickly. "Now if you don't mind . . ."

"One moment, please."

"Yes?"

"You're quite sure you believe that?"

"Quite sure. Now will you please go."

The elevator man stood motionless, as if he hadn't heard, then turned to the door, opened it, and looked back. "I believe you," he said soberly.

"Thanks," Strickland answered. The door closed behind him. The report lay on his desk, but he didn't go back to it. Instead, he listened. Footsteps sounded in the hall. Finally the elevator door clanged shut.

Strickland reached for the phone to call the building superintendent. He wanted that stupid elevator operator off his back. He picked up the phone, then dropped it and smiled. After all, a complaint might cost the elevator man his job. . .

The night didn't cool off. At 3:00 A.M. not a breath of air stirred. Strickland pushed away the report, wiped his face, got up, and left his desk. The water cooler was in the big office. He'd gone to it half a dozen times already. Now as he filled another paper cup, he again heard footsteps in the hall.

The night watchman, he thought, and the front door opened, closed. Footsteps padded toward the receptionist's empty desk, passed it, and softened on deep carpet. Suddenly the elevator man stepped from behind a glass partition.

Strickland stood perfectly still, the paper cup forgotten in his hand.

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From the other end of the room he watched the elevator man go to the office he'd just left, pause in front of the door, then go in.

Only a few moments later the elevator man came out. Strickland still hadn't moved. His best chance was to remain quiet and perhaps the fellow would go away.

But the elevator man didn't go away. Stopping, he surveyed the big office, sweeping the empty desks with his eyes. Against the far wall he saw Strickland's shadow, then Strickland himself gaping at him and at the gun in the man's hand.

The elevator man smiled.

"So there you are," he said, and started toward him.

Strickland tried to tell himself that this was some kind of joke, or nightmare. It certainly wasn't real. But the gun was, and obviously a madman was holding it. Everything came together now—the foolish questions, the queer face of the man, his fanatic eyes.

I've got to get that gun from him, Strickland told himself.

The elevator man grinned and aimed the gun at him. "All right, let's see how smart you are," he said. "You have another question to answer. Maybe this time you'll flunk it."

Strickland began to protest, but only to gain time. The night watchman should be here any minute.

"Shut up," said the elevator man. "Get ready to think, and you'd better have the right answer. Now, what are you for—love or hate? You've got ten seconds to give me the correct answer."

The correct answer was obvious—or was it with a madman rendering judgment? Strickland bit his under lip. The elevator man was counting the seconds.

"All right, time's up," he said, motioning with the gun.

"Love!" said Strickland, and the elevator man smiled at him.

"Very good," he said, lowering the gun. "I had an idea you'd slip this time, but you didn't. You're a very intelligent chap."

"So are you," Strickland answered quickly. "I'm sure you are, and that being the case, I know you'll listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"Look, if you hand me that gun, the whole matter will be forgotten. If you don't . . ."

"What then?"

"You'll find yourself in a lot of trouble. In another minute the night watchman will be here to clock in."

"The night watchman?" The elevator man smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid you're mistaken."

"What do you mean?"

"He didn't pass the test."

"What test?"

"The same one you just passed. You see, I met him down below and he wasn't as smart as you. This happens to be his gun."

"You mean you killed the old man?"

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"But what else? He was stupid. He couldn't answer the question correctly."

Strickland sucked in his breath, and then the phone rang in his office. He looked at the elevator operator. "I'd better answer, don't you think?" he said.

"I'll answer," the elevator operator said, aiming the gun at him again. "Come along."

They walked into the office and the elevator operator lifted the phone. "Hello," he said and listened for a few moments; then he cradled the instrument and smiled at Strickland. "A message for you. What's your name?"

"Strickland."

"Well, you're not to leave this office until you're informed to do so. You see, there's an insane man roaming the building. He's dangerous—a killer."

Strickland met the elevator operator's gaze. He saw the horrible grin on the man's face and shivered.

"Now, Mr. Strickland, what do you think?"

"Think?"

"Ah, you look confused. Perhaps you're frightened, but don't be. You're a very intelligent chap. Now one more question—the last question. Am I sane or insane? You have exactly ten seconds to answer correctly."

What was Strickland's answer to the last question?

EDITORS' NOTE: *Yes, what was Strickland's answer? Omitting any consideration that Strickland may have replied, "I don't know," or that he didn't reply at all, there are only two possibilities: Strickland said the elevator man was either sane or insane.*

If Strickland said the man was sane, and if that was the truth, how account for the man's insane behavior and his callous murder of the watchman?

If Strickland said the man was insane, and if that was the truth, how account for the man's sanity in such matters as freedom versus slavery, and love versus hate?

Perplexing, isn't it? And provocative . . .

In case you are one of those readers who simply can't abide loose ends, we should tell you that the author's original version ended with the phone in the office ringing again—and "this time no one answered it."

Obviously, then, the elevator man killed Strickland too; obviously, then, Strickland must have given the wrong answer to the elevator man's last question; obviously, then, Strickland must have said the man was insane . . . and yet, as we pointed out above, the madman had remarkably sane judgment on such basic values as freedom, truth, and love . . .

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 238th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . Dorothy Fletcher's "The Walewska Cross" is a charmingly roguish adventure on the French Riviera of a man who played an ingenious game of revenge . . .

The author has been reluctant to tell us about herself, but here are some gleanings from her letter: she was born in Brooklyn (hail!) and now lives in Manhattan; she attended Shore Road Academy, Adelphi College, and Pratt Institute; her vocational background includes art and merchandising, defense work and advertising, and she was once "an estate gardener in Massachusetts where my co-gardener and I lived in a wonderful old haunted house from the eighteenth century." She has visited France three times and "may go there for good in my twilight years—to a 'Rapallo' of my own."

THE WALEWSKA CROSS

by DOROTHY FLETCHER

IT WAS RAINING HARD. THAT WAS the reason I was walking under the arcade on the Place Massena—to keep dry until the deluge subsided. Ten minutes before, a great slaty stormcloud had surged across the tranquil blue of the late September sky. The first plump drops quickly became a drenching downpour as I scurried into the nearby safety of the stone overhang. And while I walked idly along, looking casually into the windows of the shops which bordered the arcade, I came to Dubois Cie—and saw the Walewska Cross.

You couldn't very well miss it. The famous Walewska Cross was prominently displayed on a kind of pedestal, luxuriously embedded in gleaming white satin. The last time I had seen the cross it had rested, not less comfortably, on the decolletage (severely restrained for that occasion) of the Countess Zaretzki.

I happened to know that the Walewska Cross was the last of what had been known as the "Zaretzki Jewels." Gina Zaretzki, as was more or less common knowledge, had been forced to dispose of this collection, piece by piece, over the last ten years. But for some reason—probably a very personal one—she had kept the cross and worn it, almost defiantly, on the fewer and

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fewer occasions when she had been invited to social gatherings of consequence. It was her last link to a world which had, in fact, perished for the Countess long ago.

So Gina had finally been forced to dispose of the cross too . . .

Knowing Roger Berstel of Dubois Cie from the many deals I had with him in better times, I realized that the money she had received for the cross wouldn't last too long. Berstel would have paid only for the rubies, which were splendid enough, but not for the masterful setting and certainly not for the historic value. The fact, proved and documented, that the cross had been given to Maria Walewska by the Emperor Napoleon would be for Berstel just an amusing bit of gossip—until he came to sell the heirloom.

I hadn't seen Gina Zaretzki in years. There had been a time—oh, long ago—when seeing the cross in Dubois' window, I would not have hesitated to go in and buy it back for her. "You really shouldn't have done it, Gina," I would have admonished her, giving her the cross—perhaps as a Christmas offering, or to celebrate the first day of spring. And she would have blushed prettily and told me, "I needed money—you know how it is, dear boy."

I *wouldn't* have known then, but I did know now.

The rain stopped, leaving steaming little rivulets on the pavements which caught the reflection of the returning sunshine. I went back to my hotel, where the receptionist gave me a message that Mr. Rutledge had called from Paris.

I knew what Mr. Rutledge wanted. Mr. Rutledge, senior partner in the world-famous advertising agency of Rutledge, Grimm, Carson and Fields wanted me, all of me, and he wanted me delivered to the aeroport at Orly on Monday evening, to be shipped to the United States of America. If he could not take delivery of me at Orly at that time, the deal was off—as he had carefully informed me and as was stated in our agreement, duly signed by both parties, of which I had a copy in my pocket.

I sat down in the lobby and took out the agreement to reread it. It wouldn't tell me anything new—I simply enjoyed looking at a figure. $35,000 a year plus expenses, for two years, with an option for two more years and sizable increases for the third and fourth years. If I stuck it out for four years it would mean nearly $200,000, which I would be able to keep fairly intact, since the expense account would cover almost everything, including wardrobe and travel.

One million new francs—almost 100 million old francs. I would be back where I had been five years ago, except that five years ago I was not even forty, whereas four years from now I would be close to fifty . . .

Yet there was no visible alternative. Even I, without the help of

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accountants and lawyers, could understand what the amount printed on the bottom of my last bank balance meant. The Montel fortune was nearly gone. What was left was not enough to try a new start. I could give up the family home, "la Becardiere," and live on what was left for another year or so, or I could use what was left to save the estate. Live there, perhaps, but not be able to afford the people to run it.

It was not all sentiment that made me hesitate to dispose of the house and all it meant. Just now la Becardiere was my Walewska Cross—something I would have to sell for the value of the stones and wood only. Of course, if I were to sell it slowly, piece by piece—the carpets, the tapestries, the paintings—I could probably realize ten times more than if I sold it en bloc for quick cash. But to do that I would have to spend every cent to clear my title, and I doubted if I had enough left even to do that.

What Rutledge had offered me would do the trick. But to get the money I would have to sell myself lock, stock, and barrel. It amounted to that—there was even a "morality clause" in the agreement: "*It is hereby agreed that this Contract shall be declared null and void by R. G. C. & F. at any time during its stipulated duration should Mr. Montel for any reason whatsoever acquire notoriety unfavorable to the public image which R. G. C. & F. has built up . . .*"

The public image: Rutledge had made it perfectly clear that I would be photographed—for the glossier publications—sitting casually and full of distinction next to a bottle of Montel. "*You can tell it's Montel,* says Paul Montel, distinguished scion of the famous Montel family."

"I really have nothing to do with the Montel wines," I had told Rutledge truthfully. "The business was sold by my grandfather." "We know that," he had said, "but you're still a Montel—and you look the part. You'll do for Montel what the famous Commander Whitehead did for Schweppes. It's a natural."

I was not the slightest bit concerned whether it was a natural or not—it was strictly a matter of one million new francs. Provided my contract wasn't cancelled for "moral turpitude." The very phrase was enough to induce someone not usually addicted to public brawls, drunken driving, or similar misdemeanors, to try something—just for the fun of it. But R. G. C. & F. were no fools. Should the contract be terminated on moral grounds, I would have to return what I had already received, prorated for the time I had been employed—so I could hardly indulge in quixotic gestures.

Today was Friday. I had come to the Riviera to talk to Lefresne and let him know my final decision about la Becardiere. I would have to call him within the next few hours, in order to settle things and take a plane for Paris in the evening. But I

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couldn't make up my mind. And I kept thinking of the Walewska Cross so as not to dwell on my own problems. Poor Gina! I wondered if she were still living at the Hotel des Deux Nations in Monte Carlo, in walking distance of the Casino.

I didn't know why, but suddenly I felt that I should see her. After all, she was an old friend and something more, and I wanted to let her know that I would soon be in a position to help her. And then, for some equally inexplicable reason, I had the feeling that Gina Zaretzki could help *me*.

I drove over to Monte Carlo. It was raining again and the Corniche was nearly deserted, so I made good time. Gina, as I had hoped she would be, was sitting in the salon at her favorite table near the window, looking sadly into the street. She seemed delighted to see me. "How wonderful, Paul!" she cried.

Gina was near, or perhaps even past, forty. But she didn't look it. "You saw the cross," she pouted. "You've come to scold me."

Her long black lashes swept down, hiding momentarily the soft splendor of her magnificent dark eyes. Her ripe mouth, painted in the pale violet she always used, pursed wryly in affected guilt. Time, I thought admiringly, had been extraordinarily decent to her, at least in the matter of looks. That broadboned face, Slavic in structure, was as smooth as ever, and her bosom rode as high and deep as I remembered it.

"Not to scold you," I said. "But you always said you'd keep the cross. What happened, Gina?"

She looked like a little girl on the verge of tears. "I had to sell it, Paul," she said. "I needed money and there was nothing else."

"I hope Berstel gave you a handsome price for it," I said.

"Don't mention that man's name," she said angrily. "I won't tell you how much he gave me for the cross. But my jewels were worth $150,000—at least, they were insured for that amount. In any event, they were worth three times what Dubois gave me for them."

"You mean Berstel gave you only one-third of their value?"

"Maybe not even that. Oh, I will tell you about the cross! He gave me 25,000 francs for it—a bagatelle!"

"Only five thousand dollars? It was worth five times that!"

"I know. But I never seemed to have time—it was always a question of urgency."

"What's he asking for it?"

"I don't know—plenty, I'm sure. Over the years that man has made a fortune with my poor jewels. I never wanted to sell *any* of them." There was a whimper in her voice. She pressed her hands, with their long tapered nails, against her throat. Her fingers were strong and slim—still lovely, but unmistakably the hands of a woman no longer young. They needed a great winking jewel—but Gina had no more jewels.

She dropped her hands into her lap and shrugged. Some women can

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do beguiling things with a lift of their shoulders. The shadows at her collarbones deepened, and her breasts stirred invitingly. "Everything's gone," she murmured. "The cross too. Now I won't have to make those agonizing decisions any more."

"I wish I could buy it back for you," I said regretfully. "But I can't. I wonder if you went to court —"

"Don't be silly, cheri," she said, shaking her head. "I have no money for lawyers. But tell me, you said you wish you *could* buy back the cross. Does it mean that you too . . . but how is that possible, Paul?"

I had to smile. My money was gone, all right, but for good reasons. The war, bad investments—at least, my money hadn't dissolved at the roulette tables as her jewels had. I told her about the job offered to me, stressing all the sordid details. If she was shocked she didn't show it.

"You'll accept it?" she asked.

"I have to. I can't think of anything else."

I didn't say, of course, that I had come to see her because of some foolish idea that she might be able to show me a way out. There was something in my head—something connected with the Walewska Cross, which had somehow given me hope.

I stayed a little longer, chatting with Gina while this subterranean thing kept churning slowly in my brain, and it wasn't until later, when I was driving back to Nice, that the idea came to me—one of those schemes that an unknown part of yourself puts teasingly into your mind. But mulling it over, I was stunned at how detailed the scheme was, how it came out of my subconscious ready-made . . .

Late that afternoon, shortly before five o'clock, I went into the discreetly elegant shop of Dubois Cie. M. Berstel came eagerly forward to greet me. "Monsieur Montel, it is a pleasure!"

"I saw the Walewska Cross in your window," I told him bruskly. "I recognized it at once—Madame Zaretzki is a dear friend of mine."

"Ah, yes." His somber expression told the whole sad story of Madame Zaretzki. "It is not easy to sell," he announced. "Even Americans don't want to pay the price for a historic jewel like that. They don't know," he added contemptuously.

"How much?" I asked, maintaining my brusk manner.

He gulped. "These pieces have a rather defined value," he said slowly. "The Walewska Cross is a famous piece, of course."

"How much?"

There was only another second's hesitation. "One hundred fifteen thousand?" he ventured.

It was almost five times what he had given Gina. "I happen to know it's worth that much," I said. "But it's more than I'll pay."

"You're interested, Monsieur?" he asked eagerly. "Why don't you

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come into my office? Perhaps we could discuss—"

"One hundred thousand is what I'm prepared to pay," I said.

He gulped again and his eyes became greedy. But he shook his head sorrowfully. "That means almost my entire profit," he said. "Could we meet halfway?"

"I don't haggle, Monsieur Berstel. One hundred thousand—not a sou more."

He stretched out his hand and I took it reluctantly. "Where can I sit down?" I asked.

"Over there," he said, surprised. I nodded, went over to the little desk, and started to write out a check for 100,000 N.F. He watched me, an anxious expression on his face. "Monsieur is paying by check?" he asked.

"Did you expect me to carry 100,000 francs in my pocket?" I asked coolly. "This is a check on the Credit Lyonnais. A reputable establishment—you have heard of it?"

He tried a smile. "Of course, Monsieur. It's only—well, it's Friday afternoon and the banks won't be open until Monday. I thought perhaps . . . if you came in Monday morning?"

I took my check and put it in my pocket. "Do you think I'd give you a bad check, Monsieur?"

He protested vehemently. "Oh, no, Monsieur Montel. It's only . . . you see, my overhead is so high." He became downright foolish.

"I would come on Monday," I said, "but I have to be in Paris early Monday morning to leave for the United States. Well, Monsieur Berstel, do you want to make this sale?"

"Of course, Monsieur Montel," he said rapidly. "After all, I know you, don't I?" I could see that he was thinking over all eventualities. Paul Montel, he must be telling himself, a good name . . .

I gave him the check and he had the Walewska Cross put in its elaborate etui and wrapped. He went with me to the door and made a point of being effusively polite.

Back at the hotel, the cross in my pocket, I put through a call to Lefresne. I assured him that the 75,000 francs needed to confirm my title to la Becardiere would be in his hands by the specified time—before noon on Monday. Then I paid my bill at the hotel, got my car, and drove to Monte Carlo again. I arrived late in the evening, checked into the Prince de Galles, and after a light supper went to bed.

Saturday morning around eleven I walked into the swank jewelry shop in the Casino Building. I knew the manager would recognize me.

"Could we go into your office?" I suggested.

"Certainly, Monsieur Montel," he said, bowing slightly, and led the way into an oak-paneled room in the rear of the shop. I took out the Walewska Cross and handed it to him. He unwrapped it, took one look, and closed the lid again. "I

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didn't know Dubois had sold it," he said.

"I bought it yesterday," I told him, nonchalently lighting a cigarette. "However, something's come up—a private matter. I need 75,000 in cash. You know the cross is worth far more than that?"

He looked at me unbelievingly. "You mean to say, Monsieur, that you bought this yesterday and want to sell it today for 75,000?"

I nodded. "Exactly. You see, I need the cash."

"But why not go back to Dubois and explain the situation?"

"I've no time for that" I said nervously. "Besides, it would be somewhat embarrassing for me. I'd rather take a loss."

"This is quite unusual," he said. "I would have to speak with my partner. Could you come back in half an hour?"

I put the cross in my pocket. "Very well," I agreed.

I went back to the hotel and settled my bill, telling the receptionist that I had to leave suddenly for Italy. Ten minutes later I was on my way to Ventimille.

I drove leisurely. I estimated that I should not arrive at the frontier before noon, so I stopped the car in Cap Martin for a while.

It was a little after twelve when I got to the customs in Ventimille. I showed my passport and almost instantly I was asked to step into the office of the frontier control.

"What for?" I demanded. "I'm in a hurry. My papers are in order and I have no baggage to be inspected."

The official insisted politely. I was taken along to see the sergeant who examined my passport carefully. "You're Monsieur Paul Montel?" he asked for good measure.

"You see I am," I said impatiently. "What's this about?"

"We had a telephone order from Nice," he explained with a studied smile. "We were asked to escort you back to the prefecture, Monsieur."

"What?" Why, that's insane! For what possible reason?"

He shrugged delicately. "I do not know, Monsieur."

"May I call Nice, then?"

"My orders are to take you back, Monsieur," he repeated. "Please . . . Rastiguet here will drive with you."

There was plainly nothing I could do. I went back to the car and I had Rastiguet, who smelled strongly of garlic, on the front seat beside me. We drove back to the prefecture in Nice, and Rastiguet, glowing with importance, led me directly to the office of the Commissaire." Monsieur Montel, sir," he said. "Brought him back from Ventimille."

The Commissaire dismissed him with an impatient wave and asked me to sit down. He appeared to be studying a sheet of paper on his desk. At last he said, "Monsieur Montel, I don't know precisely what this means, but I had to ask you to return. We have been con-

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tacted by the firm of Dubois Cie here in Nice. It seems you purchased a piece of jewelry from them?"

I nodded.

"You paid the amount of 100,000 francs with a check made out on your account at the Credit Lyonnais in Paris?"

"Exactly," I said.

"Well, let's see," he went on. "On the following morning—that is to say, this morning—you tried to sell this article in Monte Carlo for cash, asking 25,000 less than you had paid for it." He waited for my corroboration. When I agreed, he leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms behind his head. "Would you mind," he asked, "explaining the reason for that?"

"The reason? Why, it's simple enough. I bought something and paid for it. It belonged to me. I can do with it whatever I want—give it away, or sell it at a loss. What business is that of Dubois—or of yours, Monsieur le Commissaire, for that matter?"

"Well, you haven't exactly bought it, Monsieur. You gave a check for it. That is not precisely the same thing."

"Are you implying that I gave a bad check?"

"I'm not implying anything. But the facts are there, Monsieur. Why take a loss of 25,000? And why leave the country, with the jewel?"

"Private reasons. That goes for both questions," I said. "As far as I'm concerned, the jewel belonged to me as soon as I had paid for it—to dispose of as I wished."

"But Monsieur, it doesn't make sense! Nobody wants to lose 25,000 francs. You must have had a reason to ask for cash and to take this loss."

"I said I had a reason," I reminded him. "Soon after I made the purchase I found I couldn't really afford it. I discovered I needed 75,000 francs for something more important. I was embarrassed at going back to Dubois and asking them to buy it back. It was my fault and I was willing to pay for my mistake."

"But you must admit that the firm of Dubois has every reason to be worried. Of course, the manager in the Casino Building checked with Monsieur Berstel right after you were there. That would be customary in such a case. And then you try to go out of the country."

"Did Dubois Cie make a formal complaint that I tried to cheat them?"

"Oh, no. They are only trying to safeguard their interests. As a matter of fact, I am empowered to make what I believe would be a mutually satisfactory proposition."

"Such as?"

"You give back the jewel and they will return your check. It's as simple as that." He extended his hand.

"I couldn't do that," I said calmly.

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He stared at me. "You couldn't do that?" he repeated.

"Certainly not. It would amount to admitting that I gave a bad check."

"Why, not at all," he objected.

"Do you know who I am?" I asked.

"Why, certainly. Monsieur Paul Montel."

"I am not accustomed to having a check of mine questioned," I said coldly. "I won't tolerate anyone believing such a thing."

"But surely, Monsieur, surely you can appreciate Dubois' position?"

"I don't give a damn about Dubois' position," I snapped. "You bring me back forcibly from Ventimille and refuse to say on what legal grounds."

"There is such a thing Monsieur, as suspicion of fraud," the Commissaire said stiffly.

"Are you saying that I am held on suspicion of fraud? If so, state it formally and I will get in touch with my lawyer."

He winced. "*I* didn't say that, Monsieur. But Dubois Cie, if they so choose, can ask us to take that course. If you don't mind, I have Monsieur Berstel from Dubois in the next room. Why don't I have him come in? Surely we can settle this matter amicably."

Berstel was very ill at ease. He bowed stiffly and even ventured a tentative grin.

"I told Monsieur Montel that it would be agreeable to you if he returned the jewel and took his check back," the Commissaire explained. "That we could settle this on the spot."

"Or perhaps Monsieur Montel would consent to have our business settled on Monday morning, as I suggested," Berstel said quickly.

"I told you yesterday that I have to be in Paris by then, to take off for New York," I said angrily. "The only way to cancel the deal is to state outright that you believe it was concluded fraudulently."

The Commissaire looked at us both. "Perhaps you could arrange it like this, Monsieur," he suggested. "You could give us your word that you will remain in Nice until Monday morning."

"Nothing of the sort," I said flatly. "How often must I tell you that I must be in Paris by then?"

The Commissaire shrugged resignedly. "It's up to you, I'm afraid, Monsieur Berstel," he said. "Do you ask me to detain Monsieur Montel on suspicion of fraud?"

"I have no other choice," Berstel said miserably. "I am accountable to my employer."

"Very well," the Commissaire said officiously. "I will have to ask you to hand over the jewel in question to me, Monsieur Montel. And you, Berstel, to give me Monsieur Montel's check. And I must ask you, Monsieur Montel, not to leave your hotel room until we give permission."

He made out papers, which he had

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M. Berstel and me sign, and I gave him the cross. He put it, together with my check, in the safe.

"What hotel will you stay at, Monsieur?" he asked me.

"The Negresco," I said. "May I go now?"

"Certainly, Monsieur," he said with a bow.

I checked in at the Negresco. To the boy at the desk I said I would not accept any calls, and asked for my meals to be sent up. Then I went to my room. I took a short nap and at four o'clock I rang the desk and asked for the afternoon papers. The boy who brought them gave me an embarrassed look—and I knew.

The story was on the first page of the *Petit Nicois*. ". . . heir to the Montel fortune held under suspicion of fraud . . . protests innocence."

Shortly afterward the telephone rang. I took the receiver off and said, "I told you I don't want any calls." I was quickly interrupted.

"It's official, Monsieur."

It was the Commissaire. "I only wanted to tell you, Monsieur, that we did not release that story to the papers. Neither, I'm sure, did Monsieur Berstel."

"But it got into the news anyway, didn't it?" I said icily. "French journalists have a way of getting stories—for a price," I added, and hung up. There were no more telephone calls.

The Commissaire came personally on Monday, shortly after ten. "Everything is cleared up, Monsieur," he said with forced gaiety. "Stupid thing, but these things happen."

"You checked with the Credit Lyonnais in Paris?"

"We did, and your check is covered, Monsieur."

"You don't say," I remarked. "And you told the bank manager, of course, that the police in Nice wanted the information. Of course you did—otherwise he wouldn't have given it. This is just fine for my credit standing. Not that it matters. The Paris newspapers will have picked up the story anyway."

"Very unfortunate," he said sorrowfully. "But you realize, Monsieur, we only did our duty. By the way, I have the jewel here with me. If you will kindly sign this—"

"I don't want the jewel. I want my check back. I am canceling the deal."

"Oh, well . . . I suppose it is up to you, Monsieur," he said. He took my check out of his brief case and gave it to me. I tore it up and threw the scraps into the waste basket while the Commissaire watched with awe. After all, a 100,000 franc check!

When he had left I made out a check for 75,000 francs, payable to Lefresne, and sent it over by messenger. It was good to know that la Becardiere was mine again.

The airmail letter reached me in the early afternoon. It was from Rutledge—a nice, friendly letter

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protesting his unshakable belief that I was the victim of incredible and annoying circumstances, but at the same time asking for my understanding that under the circumstances he would have to ask me to consider our agreement null and void. The official reason, if agreeable to me, would be that I could not take off for New York on the date stipulated and that R. G. C. & F. therefore had to make other arrangements.

The meeting with Dubois' lawyers was rather entertaining.

"I am agreeable," I said, "to settling this matter out of court, but there is the undeniable fact that their action occasioned a considerable loss for me—to the tune of at least $50,000 and at most $200,000, my assured earnings with Rutledge, Grimm, Carson and Fields. There is further the matter of the extremely grave injury to my reputation, the damages suffered through false publicity, and so forth. I feel entitled to the 500,000 francs I ask in damages."

Dubois' lawyers protested that such a sum was out of the question, that it would bankrupt the firm.

"It happens to be exactly what Dubois Cie profited from a single customer," I told them casually. "I know for a fact that they acquired, over a period of years, jewels worth half a million francs and paid only one-fifth of that amount. I'm quite willing to have your accountants check before we arrange a final settlement of this matter. Perhaps we might find that my friend was not the only client with whom Dubois Cie made such profitable deals."

The final settlement amounted to 375,000 francs, or $75,000. It was a little more, I calculated, than what Dubois had cheated out of Gina Zaretzki. But, as I said to their lawyers, there certainly had been other victims like Gina.

When the money was paid into my account I made out a check for 100,000 francs and sent it to Gina. I wanted it in her hands before I saw her again. It was nice to contemplate the extent and nature of her gratitude.

But I sincerely felt that she was more than entitled to a share. I considered stipulating that she should buy back the Walewska Cross with the money, but I decided against it. After all, her chances at the roulette tables in Monte Carlo were better with a capital of 100,000 francs than with the 25,000 which Berstel or some other shark would give her when, after an agonizing period, she would decide to sell it again. And too, it might be a superstition, but I have always heard that your fortune in the gambling casinos is better when you play with slightly tainted money . . .

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A MATTER OF JUDGMENT

by K. T. EDWARDS

"AT LAST IT WAS OVER!" ANGIE sighed. "It was such a beautiful funeral, and the flowers were lovely. And so many people were there. Of course, most of them were my friends.

"Frank didn't have any friends, really. He was always too suspicious of people to let anyone get close to him. That was one of the things that annoyed me during the nineteen years we were married. In fact, it's what finally made me decide to go back to work after all those years of just staying at home, doing the housework, and getting more bored every day—I mean, after the children grew up and no longer needed all my attention.

"We never went anywhere. Just sat home night after night, with Frank watching television, never realizing how hungry I was for conversation with *someone*. Really, I think he just didn't care.

"In earlier years when I invited people in for the evening, he would deliberately get home late; then

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when he did arrive he would be so rude that our guests would make some excuse to leave early.

"After a while we were never invited out any more. In the days when we were, Frank wouldn't get home in time and I would have to go alone, or more often I'd call up and say we couldn't make it. Or if he did go with me, he would make himself so obnoxious that we were never asked again.

"It was about six years ago that the idea of getting rid of him first entered my mind. But that was before I met Pat, three years ago. And then only last week I decided that if I was ever going to be free, it would have to be now. That's when I really made up my mind to go ahead with it." Angie sighed again.

"Then you have come here to confess?" asked the official.

"Well, I suppose it could be called a confession," said Angie.

The official pushed a button and spoke into a box. "Paul, will you come in, please?"

In a few moments the door opened and another official came in, sat down at a smaller desk, and prepared to take notes.

"You may proceed, Mrs. Dole. Just start at the beginning, please."

"Very well," said Angie. "But I won't bore you with all the details. Let's just say that the early years of our marriage were quite hectic. If it hadn't been for the children I don't think I would have stayed with him at all. There was his constant drinking, gambling . . . Then the war came and that seemed to sober him up and make a real man of him—at least, for a while. During those years he was like a different person—sweet, loving, and kind to me and to the children. I started to fall in love with him all over again—just like before we were married.

"Then he was in that accident while driving an Army jeep. He received a head injury that kept him in the hospital for three months, and after that they discharged him. Everything was fine for a while and then he started having those seizures. The doctor said it was from the blow on the head. Fortunately, we could keep the attacks under control with some little white pills that Frank had to take every morning and night.

"But he never was really right again. We'd never know what kind of mood he would be in when he came home from work. Sometimes he was happy and full of fun; more often he was depressed and nervous. Sometimes the least little word would set him off, and he'd go into a terrible temper and shout at everyone, and even hit the children if they got in his way.

"Well, after eight years of this I was beginning to be a nervous wreck myself. That was when I decided to go back into the business world.

"I began working for a large firm —and that's where I met Pat. We

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were working in the same department and started having coffee together—during the coffee breaks, you know—and we soon became very well acquainted.

"I learned that we were the same age, that he had a wife, and that they had been married for five years and had not been able to have any children. They were beginning to be bored with each other and were considering a divorce.

"I wasn't quite sure how Pat felt about me—I knew he liked me, because he didn't talk much with anyone else. But I felt myself becoming very attached to him, and I got scared, so I asked for a transfer to another department.

"For three months we didn't even see each other and I really thought I had put him completely out of my mind. Then one day he walked into my office and told me that he had been transferred to my department. That's when it started all over again.

"Believe me, sir, I fought it—but I was so hungry for love again, for a man who didn't depend on me for everything—for a little tenderness . . . And then Pat told me that after all these years his wife was going to have a baby.

"At first I thought that would end everything between Pat and me. But when Pat's wife died in childbirth—well, I guess that's what brought the whole thing to a climax. Of course, Pat was terribly upset for a time—but he was so lonely, and I felt so sorry for him . . .

"But what could I do? Divorce Frank? No, he was too dependent on me, and besides, I had to consider my children, as well as what people would say. In a small town like ours something like that can ruin you. But with Pat's wife gone, if Frank should also die . . .

"So I started planning again. I went to my doctor and complained of some imaginary pains. He examined me and of course found nothing wrong, but to placate me, as I knew he would, he gave me a prescription. It was only a placebo, but it was in tablet form—little white tablets, very much like the ones Frank had to take.

"I went home and substituted my pill for Frank's. I knew that after a day or two of taking the placebos he would have a seizure, and as a result he'd become unconscious.

"Oh, I had it planned carefully. I knew exactly what I was going to do! And no one would ever know because I'd switch the pills again and it would look as if Frank's medicine hadn't worked.

"And sure enough, one night he began to make the strange gurgling noises that accompanied the seizures. He thrashed around as he always did at first, and then all at once he went limp . . .

"I thought of our long years of unhappiness . . . of Pat and the life we could have together . . .

"And so I took my pillow and put it over his face, holding it tight on

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the ends and pressing my chest down over it.

"Then suddenly I was on *my* back—and Frank was on me, and he was pressing the pillow over *my* face! Then I realized that he had only pretended to have a seizure—that somehow he had found out about Pat and me, and guessed what I had done . . .

"But Frank did give me a lovely funeral—and so many of my friends came—and there were so many beautiful flowers.

"And now that you've heard my story," Angie said anxiously to the official behind the larger desk, "are you going to let me in, Saint Peter?"

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Lawrence, Hilda	DEATH OF A DOLL	Dolphin	95¢	9/21/62
Prather, Richard S.	EVERYBODY HAD A GUN	Gold Medal	35¢	8/30/62
Prather, Richard S.	LIE DOWN, KILLER	Gold Medal	35¢	8/30/62
Queen, Ellery (Editor)	ELLERY QUEEN'S 16TH MYSTERY ANNUAL	Popular Library	40¢	9/20/62
Stout, Rex	IN THE BEST OF FAMILIES	Bantam Books	40¢	8/27/62

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PAUL W. FAIRMAN**

TITLE: ***Any Man's Death***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Father Runyon faced many problems in his poor parish—but none so tragic as the case of Luis and Maria. In the end it was John Donne, the great mystic poet, who helped the good Father to understanding.*

THE TRAGIC NEWS CAME AT A bad time for Father Runyon—at a time when the weight and weariness of his 65 years lay heavy within him. For many years now his brisk step, his erect bearing, his unfailing good cheer had been landmarks in St. Timothy's parish—his looming, rawboned presence as much a part of St. Timothy's as its bleak tenements, its mixed and confused population, its sullen atmosphere of poised violence . . .

The morning had been bright and sunny, but when Father Runyon was halfway through his calls, an unseasonable chill puffed in from the waterfront. He'd begun his calls on Avenue D, climbing the four long flights to the dank cubicle that Luis and Maria Sanchez called home. And while he climbed, the old anger at this filth and squalor darkened his blue eyes.

Father Runyon had been truly militant in his protests against these terrible conditions—but justice had proved an elusive thing. The law, Father Runyon had learned, was a cumbersome structure through which phantom landlords appeared briefly to pay fines and then vanished, leaving conditions exactly as before. It was very difficult even for Father Runyon to feel charitable toward these creatures he'd seen before the bench—or even to think of them as fellow human beings.

But on this day his main worry

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was Maria Sanchez, the dark-eyed child-wife up there in that fetid room —a frightened mother-to-be protecting her child from marauding rats —yes, literally with her own body.

Maria and Luis—she with her faith in God, he with his erratic nature, his low boiling point, his sensitive artist's hands. Luis Sanchez was the core of the problem—Luis with his hands too often doubling into fists.

They had come with such high hopes, these *children*. But they had been so miserably equipped for life in a strange land. Maria met the challenge with prayers to the Virgin Mother, Luis with a hostility born of pride and bewilderment . . .

Father Runyon knocked on the Sanchez door. Maria opened it and the gratitude and welcome in her eyes rewarded him for his long climb. But there was something else in her eyes—fear of the coming nights and days, fear of what this hostile environment would do to her unborn child.

Father Runyon wanted to reach out and take the girl in his arms and comfort her; instead, he concentrated on making his good morning cheerful, and added, "I see Luis is off to his job. He'll do very well, Maria. You wait and see."

"I hope so, Father."

Father Runyon devoutly hoped so too. It was the third job he'd found for Luis in as many months. "And as to the little one—he's going to be fine too."

Maria Sanchez smiled at Father Runyon's confidence that her baby would be a boy. "Yes, Father."

"I spoke to Doctor Williams at the clinic only yesterday. He says it will be a fine baby. You *are* taking the vitamins every day?"

"Oh, yes, Father."

"And you know just what you're to do. When the pains start, Luis is to take you straight to the hospital. If they come during the day when he's at work, you're to phone me from downstairs. If I'm not there, Mrs. Hennessey will know where to find me."

Maria Sanchez' great dark eyes overflowed. "Father, you are so good—"

"Now, now. You must not be afraid. The Blessed Mother—"

"I am not afraid. My tears are for Luis. My fears are truly for him."

"Oh, but Luis and I had a long talk. We made a pact—an understanding for the future, you might call it."

"Perhaps. But last night he did not sleep. All night he paced the floor whispering curses. There—" she indicated a broken spot in the wall "—there he stood and hit the plaster with his fist until it crumbled and his knuckles were covered with blood."

"Be patient, Maria. When the baby comes—when Luis sees his son—the pride of fatherhood will steady him. Just a little more time, my child."

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"Yes, Father."

He left her then because there were others to be visited. But downstairs in the tenement entrance he hesitated. The chill had brought clouds in from the ocean and a cold rain was now pelting down on Avenue D.

My way of life is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf . . .

Father Runyon sighed. Did not Macbeth's immortal lament apply to him also?

And now all his optimisms lay limp and wet under the pounding rain—buried beneath the tired years. Even Shakespeare was of no help.

He hunched down into his upturned collar and plunged into the street . . .

Mrs. Hennessey, the traditional brow-beating, pampering housekeeper, received Father Runyon with a scowl and much indignation.

"Sure and if you're yearning for your heavenly reward, there's no quicker road to collection than the pneumonia route."

She badgered him into a hot bath and parboiled his throat with scalding tea. Only then was he allowed to escape into his library—into sanctuary.

Father Runyon and his beloved books. They were all there—Plato, Ibsen, Dostoevsky, St. Augustine. And on a shelf all his own, the mighty Shakespeare.

These and many, many more, but the lot of them were not at all impressive in appearance. Indeed they looked rather like an army of discredited prophets, in their cheap bindings and stained covers. A library collected from bargain counters because St. Timothy's was a poor parish and Father Runyon's limited means never extended beyond his people's needs. Expensive books would have been a sin. But a quarter here, a half dollar there, and Father Runyon was still able to walk with giants.

On this particular evening he sought counsel from none of them. In the grip of frustration he morosely examined his own thoughts. A man dreamed; a man worked. But where were the results? The years raced by. And a man doubted. Always a man doubted.

Depressed, Father Runyon sought out a book he'd long neglected—*The Works of John Donne*. The book was very old, its condition pathetically ragged. He gazed on it without enthusiasm.

John Donne had never been a favorite of Father Runyon's. Dead more than 300 years, the somber Englishman's thoughts had a massive, brooding quality that repelled him. But now Father Runyon opened the book to one of Donne's most famous "devotions" and read it in its original form:

No man is an Iland, intire of it self; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe

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is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine own were. Any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee.

Father Runyon closed his eyes and considered the idea. Arresting. No man is an island . . . Hemingway's searching genius had used that springboard for one of the most powerful novels of modern times. *Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind . . .*

The phone at Father Runyon's elbow rang sharply. He picked it up and heard Sergeant Emmons of the 19th precinct:

". . . so it looks like the only thing to do is blast him out."

Father Runyon strove desperately to clear his mind. "Tom—just a minute—not quite so fast. Give it to me again."

"The Luis Sanchez character. Your protégé." There was a marked inflection on the "your."

"Yes—Luis. I got him a job at Danvers' supermarket."

"But not for overtime work on their safe. A patrolman spotted him. He broke away and got clear but then he went straight home. He has a gun and he's using the room for a fort."

"Maria—is she with him?"

"I'll give it to you straight, Father. We've no reason to believe she left. No one saw her go. But we've only heard *his* voice. No sound of anybody else and those walls are paper-thin. I think maybe he's killed her."

"Why, that's nonsense! Luis wouldn't—"

"Don't be too sure. He's gone completely off his rocker. And like I told you, Father, I'm not going to risk the life of a single man. If I have to riddle that rat's nest with slugs, I'll do it."

"Then why did you call me, Tom?" Father Runyon asked quietly.

"Well, he's—I know you're interested in him, and—"

"Then you'll hold off until I get there?"

"If it's humanly possible, Father. But you'd better hurry."

The rain had almost worn itself out, but what was left made bright streaks across the beams of the searchlights trained on the fourth floor of the Avenue D tenement. A crowd had gathered. They were being pushed back when Father Runyon arrived—a streetful of upturned faces that somehow made him think of ancient Romans banked in the Colosseum's tiers. Had there been any change at all in the past 2,000 years?

A patrolman led Father Runyon to a group in shiny black raincoats huddled behind one of the lights. Sergeant Emmons, his big homely face streaked with rain and sweat,

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said, "I've got to do something, Father, before he takes a notion to scatter a few shots into the crowd. A dead bystander or two—that's all we need."

"I want to go up and talk to him, Tom. I think I can reason with him."

Sergeant Emmons was torn between his respect for the cloth and an urge to tell Father Runyon the fact of life about dealing with an armed maniac. "He's clean off his rocker, I tell you!"

"Maria—is she still—?"

"Nothing new. I'll still give odds she's dead."

"But she was going to have a child!"

"That's why I'd give odds. A notion for his crazy mind to latch onto. No child of his will be born into a world like this—that kind of sheer lunacy."

"You're wrong, Tom. You've got to be wrong."

"All I know for sure is that he's a living, breathing menace with a loaded rifle in his hands." Emmons glanced around guiltily. "Oh, hell, Father! Do you think I want to shoot him down like an animal? But one of my men has already been carried out. My cops don't want to die either."

One of the raincoated men said, "Going down through the roof's the logical way, Sergeant. I could—"

"Let me try to talk to him," Father Runyon interrupted. "Otherwise, what was the good in my coming here? You *did* call me. You *did* wait."

"All right," Emmons conceded. "Come with me. I want you to take your time on those stairs, though. It's a long climb."

"I've climbed them before."

As Father Runyon moved ahead, Emmons' eyes tendered a respect not easily won from a hard-bitten, practical policeman. "Yeah, I guess you have at that, Father . . . One side, Barney. We're going in."

The fourth-floor hallway was lit by beams from the searchlights. At the head of the stairs three officers waited—shadow men in an unreal world. "Stand easy," Emmons said. "This is Father Runyon. He knows the lad. He's going to have a try at reasoning with him."

"How is Clarkson?" a shadow growled.

"Okay," Emmons replied. "One in the shoulder, one in the thigh. Come with me, Father." He pushed ahead and went down the hallway to a point about twenty feet from where it ended, where—in an earlier test of fire between the police and Luis Sanchez—the hall window had been shot almost completely away.

"It's not safe beyond here," Emmons warned. "Any closer, and his slugs can angle through those paper walls and cut you down. That was how Clarkson got it."

Father Runyon could see, by the searchlight's beam, that the walls beyond were marked with the savage pocks of bullets.

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"You can call out to him from here."

"Luis—Luis—this is Father Runyon. Can you hear me?" "Luis, please listen to me." He tried to speak loud enough for the boy to hear and still keep his voice below yelling pitch.

There was no answer.

"He hears you all right," Emmons said.

"He knows the police are with me. He suspects a trick. If you would go back to the others—"

Emmons compromised by moving back a few steps.

"Luis, tell me—is Maria all right?"

Still no answer.

"You must let Maria come out, Luis. She is your wife. She is going to bear you a son. You must let her come out."

He could have been talking to the smashed-out hall window.

"Luis, *please* listen to me. You have not killed anyone. The policeman you hit will be all right. And we understand, Luis. We want to help you. *I* want only to help. Come out, Luis—for Maria's sake—for your child's sake."

Father Runyon strained his ears against the noises coming up from the street. He pressed his ear close to the wall. There was no answer.

He straightened and walked farther down the hall and stood in front of the door. That too had been riddled with bullets. He heard a sharp order from Emmons back in the hallway; a curse, then a plea, but he paid no attention.

"Luis," he called. "If you must kill—if you are bent on killing someone—it must be me. I am the one you must kill, Luis, because I will forgive you and after your sanity returns that forgiveness will be very important to you. Believe me, Luis, it will. So I am the one you must kill."

He waited. There was no sound.

"I am coming in, Luis."

He grasped the knob of the door. The door opened. He walked in.

Luis Sanchez stood in the far corner of the room. He could have been a statue except that no sculptor could have put all that fear and hatred and defiance in a man's face. He gripped the gun like a shield across his chest, but he said nothing.

Father Runyon glanced round the room. Maria was not there.

"Give me the gun, Luis. Then we will go downstairs."

Luis Sanchez neither moved nor spoke. Father Runyon crossed the room and took the barrel of the gun in his grasp. It came loosely out of Luis's hands. Father Runyon put his hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Where is Maria, Luis?"

The youth stared, uncomprehending.

"Come. We will go and find her."

They walked out of the room into the glare of the hallway. "We are going downstairs," Father Runyon said.

One of the policemen came for-

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ward—one of the shadow men. He laid a heavy hand on Luis Sanchez' other shoulder.

It was like the throwing of a switch. Luis Sanchez came instantly alive. He lashed out, hitting nothing. His face twisted as his high thin scream ripped through the hallway. But his turning and lunging were too quick for them, and before they could stop him he whirled, ran to the window, and threw himself out headfirst.

Father Runyon ran to the window. Below, in the glare of the searchlights, Luis Sanchez lay face up. And it was as though Father Runyon could see that dead face telescopically, as though nothing else existed in the entire world except that empty, battered face . . .

"We'll find the girl, Father." Sergeant Emmons gave this assurance as they stood in the cold drizzle beside the broken, sheeted figure in the street. "She went to some friend's house. Scared to death probably. We'll find her."

"I'm sure you will."

"But right now I'm getting you home. This is no weather for you to be out in."

"Tell Officer Clarkson that I'm sorry."

"I'll do that, but it's all in the line of duty." Sergeant Emmons looked down at the body of Luis Sanchez. "Thank God no one was killed," he said.

The horror of the words hit Father Runyon even though he knew what Sergeant Emmons meant; and suddenly the words seemed a terrible clarification of all that was wrong in this worst possible of worlds.

He turned suddenly and strode off into the night.

He walked for a long time. He walked up one dark street and down another, through the sleeping and uncaring city, through the brute city—a man whose business was faith but who had now lost his own. A man who had labored all his years with his heart and mind and body, to come at last to the fruits of those labors.

The accusing face of a dead boy on a bloody pavement—a boy whose soundless voice called to him: *My failure and your failure are one. The tolling is for thee as well as me . . .*

He went home at last and entered the church and knelt before the altar which—though the sacrilege of the thought writhed in his soul—had almost lost meaning to him. He knelt there for a long time and then rose and went back through the church just in time to meet Mrs. Hennessey passing through the sacristy door.

"Oh, there you are, Father. I called everywhere for you. The girl. Maria. She is here."

Of course. He should have known. This was where she would have come.

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"The mother and her child. I found them here in the church when the child gave its first cry."

"The child! Here in the church?"

Mrs. Hennessey bristled. "Sure and the poor girl was terrified. With her husband gone mad and the world just as crazy, what better place to give birth than here in the sight of God?"

"Where is she now?"

"I've put her in my room."

He found Maria Sanchez sleeping with her babe in her arms, with the sweat of her ordeal still damp on her young face; but the fear was gone and a faint smile hovered on her lips. Softly he brushed her hair back from her sleeping eyes.

He lifted the blanket and looked at the child, red and puckered with its blind face to the mother's breast. He lowered the blanket gently and went out of the room, back through the church and into the open air.

Dawn had broken, and the rain clouds, retreating with the night, showed the blue heaven above. The morning cheered Father Runyon.

But there was something more—something deeper and far more important than the clear morning. It was a thing within him and he grasped at its elusiveness.

John Donne. What had he said? *Any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.* Certainly, but wasn't that only half of it? Wasn't there another side to the coin? Hadn't Donne stopped too soon?

A new strength, both fierce and joyful, stirred deep within Father Runyon.

If I am diminished by any man's death, then also am I replenished by any child's birth.

Had not Donne put away his melancholy pen too soon? Should he not have added? *But send thee indeed to know what man's child is born. That child is also thine.*

"Q"

NEXT MONTH . . .

Winner of a Second Prize —

STANLEY ELLIN'S *The Question My Son Asked*

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a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **PATRICIA HIGHSMITH**

TITLE: ***The Terrapin***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Perhaps the real trouble was that Victor's mother wanted him to stay about six years old, forever, all his life . . . An odd and thoroughly fascinating story.*

VICTOR HEARD THE ELEVATOR door open, his mother's quick footsteps in the hall, and he flipped his book shut. He shoved it under the sofa pillow, and winced as he heard it slip between sofa and wall and fall to the floor with a thud. Her key was in the lock.

"Hello, Veector-r!" she cried, raising one arm in the air. Her other arm circled a big brown-paper bag, her hand held a cluster of little bags. "I have been to my publisher and to the market and also to the fish market," she told him. "Why aren't you out playing? It's a lovely, lovely day!"

"I was out," he said. "For a little while. I got cold."

"Ugh!" She was unloading the grocery bag in the tiny kitchen off the foyer. "You are seeck, you know that? In the month of October, you are cold? I see all kinds of children playing on the sidewalk. Even I think that boy you like. What's his name?"

"I don't know," Victor said.

His mother wasn't really listening, anyway. He pushed his hands into the pockets of his too-small shorts, making them tighter than ever, and walked aimlessly around the living room, looking down at his heavy,

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scuffed shoes. At least, his mother had to buy him shoes that fit him, and he rather liked these shoes, because they had the thickest soles of any he had ever owned, and they had heavy toes that rose up a little, like mountain climbers' shoes.

Victor paused at the window and looked straight out at a toast-colored apartment building across Third Avenue. He and his mother lived on the eighteenth floor, just below the top floor where the penthouses were. The building across the street was even taller than this one. Victor had liked their Riverside Drive apartment better. He had liked the school he had gone to there better. Here they laughed at his clothes. In the other school they had got tired of laughing at them.

"You don't want to go out?" asked his mother, coming into the living room, wiping her hands briskly on a wadded paper bag. She sniffed her palms. "Ugh! That stee-enk!"

"No, Mama," Victor said patiently.

"Today is Saturday."

"I know."

"Can you say the days of the week?"

"Of course."

"Say them."

"I don't want to say them. I know them." His eyes began to sting around the edges with tears. "I've known them for years. Years and years. Kids five years old can say the days of the week."

But his mother was not listening. She was bending over the drawing table in the corner of the room. She had worked late on something last night. On his sofa bed in the opposite corner of the room, Victor had not been able to sleep until two in the morning, when his mother had finally gone to bed on the studio couch.

"Come here, Victor. Did you see this?"

Victor came on dragging feet, hands still in his pockets. No, he hadn't even glanced at her drawing board this morning, hadn't wanted to.

"This is Pedro, the Little Donkey. I invented him last night. What do you think? And this is Miguel, the little Mexican boy who rides him. They ride and ride over all of Mexico, and Miguel thinks they are lost, but Pedro knows the way home all the time, and . . ."

Victor did not listen. He deliberately shut his ears in a way he had learned to do from many years of practice; but boredom, frustration—he knew the word frustration, had read all about it—clamped his shoulders, weighed like a stone in his body, pressed hatred and tears up to his eyes as if a volcano were seething in him.

He had hoped his mother might take a hint from his saying he was too cold in his silly shorts. He had hoped his mother might remember what he had told her—that the fellow he had wanted to get ac-

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quainted with downstairs, a fellow who looked about his own age, eleven, had laughed at his short pants on Monday afternoon. *They make you wear your kid brother's pants or something?* Victor had drifted away, mortified. What if the fellow knew he didn't even own any longer pants, not even a pair of knickers, much less *long* pants or even blue jeans!

His mother, for some cockeyed reason, wanted him to look "French," and made him wear shorts and stockings that came up to just below his knees, and dopey shirts with round collars. His mother wanted him to stay about six years old, forever, all his life.

She liked to test out her drawings on him. *Victor is my sounding board*, she sometimes said to her friends. *I show my drawings to Victor and I know if children will like them.* Often Victor said he liked stories that he did not like, or drawings that he was indifferent to, because he felt sorry for his mother and because it put her in a better mood if he said he liked them. He was quite tired now of children's book illustrations, if he had ever in his life liked them—he really couldn't remember; and now he had only two favorites—Howard Pyle's illustrations in some of Robert Louis Stevenson's books and Cruikshank's in Dickens.

It was too bad, Victor thought, that he was absolutely the last person his mother should have asked an opinion of, because he simply *hated* children's illustrations. And it was a wonder his mother didn't see this, because she hadn't sold any illustrations for books for years and years—not since *Wimple-Dimple*, a book whose jacket was all torn and turning yellow now from age, which sat in the center of the bookshelf in a little cleared spot, propped up against the back of the bookcase so that everyone could see it.

Victor had been seven years old when that book was printed. His mother liked to tell people—and remind him, too—that he had watched her make every drawing, had shown his opinion by laughing or not, and that she had been absolutely guided by him. Victor doubted this very much, because first of all the story was somebody else's and had been written before his mother did the drawings, and her drawings had had to follow the story closely.

Since *Wimple-Dimple*, his mother had done only a few illustrations now and then for children's magazines—how to make paper pumpkins and black paper cats for Halloween and things like that—though she took her portfolio around to publishers all the time.

Their income came from his father, who was a wealthy businessman in France, an exporter of perfumes. His mother said he was very wealthy and very handsome. But he had married again, and he never wrote, and Victor had no interest in him, didn't even care if he never

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saw a picture of him, and he never had. His father was French with some Polish, his mother said, and she was Hungarian with some French. The word Hungarian made Victor think of gypsies, but when he had asked his mother once, she had said emphatically that she hadn't any gypsy blood, and she had been annoyed that Victor had brought the question up.

And now she was sounding him out again, poking him in the ribs to make him wake up, as she repeated, "Listen to me! Which do you like better, Victor? 'In all Mexico there was no bur-r-ro as wise as Miguel's Pedro,' or 'Miguel's Pedro was the wisest bur-r-ro in all Mexico'?"

"I think—I like it the first way better."

"Which way is that?" demanded his mother, thumping her palm down on the illustration.

Victor tried to remember the wording, but realized he was only staring at the pencil smudges, the thumbprints on the edges of his mother's illustration board. The colored drawing in its center did not interest him at all. He was not thinking. This was a frequent, familiar sensation to him now; there was something exciting and important about not-thinking, Victor felt, and he thought that one day he would find out something about it—perhaps under another name—in the Public Library or in the psychology books around the house that he browsed in when his mother was out.

"Veec-tor! What are you doing?"

"Nothing, Mama."

"That is exactly it! Nothing! Can you not even *think*?"

A warm shame spread through him. It was as if his mother read his thoughts about not-thinking. "I am thinking," he protested. "I'm thinking about *not*-thinking." His tone was defiant. What could she do about it, after all?

"About what?" Her black, curly head tilted, her mascaraed eyes narrowed at him.

"Not-thinking."

His mother put her jeweled hands on her hips. "Do you know, Victor, you are a leetle bit strange in the head?" She nodded. "You are seeck. Psychologically seeck. And retarded, do you know that? You have the behavior of a leetle boy five years old," she said slowly and weightily. "It is just as well you spend your Saturdays indoors. Who knows if you would not walk in front of a car, eh? But that is why I love you, little Victor."

She put her arm around his shoulders, pulled him against her, and for an instant Victor's nose pressed into her large, soft bosom. She was wearing her flesh-colored knitted dress, the one you could see through a little where her breast stretched it out.

Victor jerked his head away in a confusion of emotions. He did not know if he wanted to laugh or cry.

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His mother was laughing gaily, her head back. "Seeck you are! Look at you! My lee-tle boy still, lee-tle short pants—ha! ha!"

Now the tears showed in his eyes, and his mother acted as if she were enjoying it! Victor turned his head away so that she would not see his eyes. Then suddenly he faced her. "Do you think I *like* these pants? *You* like them, not me, so why do you have to make fun of them?"

"A lee-tle boy who's crying!" she went on, laughing.

Victor made a dash for the bathroom, then swerved away and dove onto the sofa, his face toward the pillows. He shut his eyes tight and opened his mouth, crying but not-crying in a way he had also learned through long practice. With his mouth open, his throat tight, not breathing for nearly a minute, he could somehow get the satisfaction of crying, screaming even, without anybody knowing it.

He pushed his nose, his open mouth, his teeth, against the tomato-red sofa pillow, and though his mother's voice went on in a lazily mocking tone, and her laughter went on, he imagined that it was getting fainter and more distant from him.

He imagined, rigid in every muscle, that he was suffering the absolute worst that any human being could suffer. He imagined that he was dying. But he did not think of death as an escape, only as a concentrated and painful instant. This was the climax of his not-crying.

Then he breathed again, and his mother's voice intruded: "Did you hear me? *Did you hear me?* Mrs. Badzerkian is coming over for tea. I want you to wash your face and put on a clean shirt. I want you to recite something for her. Now what are you going to recite?"

" 'In winter when I go to bed,' " said Victor. She was making him memorize every poem in *A Child's Garden of Verses.* He had said the first one that came in his head, and now there was an argument, because he had recited that the last time Mrs. Badzerkian came to tea. "I said it because I couldn't think of any other one right off the bat!" Victor shouted.

"Don't yell at me!" his mother cried, storming across the room at him.

She slapped his face before he knew what was happening.

He was up on one elbow on the sofa, on his back, his long, knobby-kneed legs splayed out in front of him. All right, he thought, if that's the way it is, that's the way it is. He looked at her with loathing.

He would not show her that the slap had hurt, that it still stung. No more tears for today, he swore, not even any more not-crying. He would finish the day, go through the tea, like a stone, like a soldier, not wincing.

His mother paced the room, turning one of her rings round and

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round, glancing at him from time to time, looking quickly away from him. But his eyes were steady on her. He was not afraid. She could even slap him again and he wouldn't move.

At last she announced that she was going to wash her hair, and she went into the bathroom.

Victor got up from the sofa and wandered across the room. He wished he had a room of his own to go to. In the apartment on Riverside Drive there had been two rooms, a living room and his mother's bedroom. When she was in the living room, he had been able to go into the bedroom, and vice versa, but here—They were going to tear down the old building they had lived in on Riverside Drive. It was not a pleasant thing for Victor to think about.

Suddenly remembering the book that had fallen, he pulled out the sofa and reached for it. It was Menninger's *The Human Mind*, full of fascinating case histories of people. Victor put it back in its place on the bookshelf between a book on astrology and *How to Draw*.

His mother did not like him to read psychology books, but Victor loved them, especially ones with case histories in them. The people in the case histories did what they wanted to do. They were natural. Nobody bossed them. At the local branch library he spent hours browsing through the psychology shelves. They were in the adults' section, but the librarian did not mind him sitting at the tables there, because he was always so quiet.

Victor went into the kitchen and got a glass of water. As he was standing there drinking it, he heard a scratching noise coming from the paper bags on the counter. A mouse, he thought, but when he moved a couple of the bags he didn't see any mouse. The scratching was coming from inside one of the bags.

Gingerly, he opened the bag's end with his fingers and waited for something to jump out. Looking in, he saw a white paper carton. He pulled it out slowly. Its bottom was damp. It opened like a pastry box. Victor jumped in surprise. In the box was a turtle—a live turtle!

It was wriggling its legs in the air, trying to turn over. Victor moistened his lips, and frowning with concentration, took the turtle by its sides with both hands, turned him over, and let him down gently into the box again. The turtle drew its feet in then and its head stretched up a little and it looked right at him.

Victor smiled. Why hadn't his mother told him she'd brought him a present? A live turtle! Victor's eyes glazed with anticipation as he thought of taking the turtle down, maybe with a leash around its neck, to show the fellow who'd laughed at his short pants. The boy might change his mind about being friends with him, if he learned that Victor owned a live turtle.

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"Hey, Mama! Mama!" Victor yelled at the bathroom door. "You brought me a turtle?"

"A what?" The water shut off.

"A turtle! In the kitchen!" Victor had been jumping up and down in the hall. He stopped.

His mother had hesitated, too. The water came on again, and she said in a shrill tone, "*C'est une terrapène! Pour un ragout!*"

Victor understood, and a small chill went over him because his mother had spoken in French. His mother addressed him in French only when she was giving an order that had to be obeyed, or when she anticipated resistance from him.

So the terrapin was for a stew. Victor nodded to himself with a stunned resignation, and went back to the kitchen. For a stew. Well, the terrapin was not long for this world, as they say. What did a terrapin like to eat? Lettuce? Raw bacon? Boiled potato? Victor peered into the refrigerator.

He held a piece of lettuce near the terrapin's horny mouth. The terrapin did not open its mouth, but it looked at him. Victor held it near the two little dots of its nostrils, but if the terrapin smelled the lettuce, it showed no interest. Victor looked under the sink and pulled out a round wash pan. He put two inches of water into it. Then he gently dumped the terrapin into the pan. The terrapin paddled for a few seconds, as if it had to swim; then finding that its stomach sat on the bottom of the pan, it stopped, and drew its feet in.

Victor got down on his knees and studied the terrapin's face. Its upper lip overhung the lower, giving it a rather stubborn and unfriendly expression; but its eyes—they were bright and shining. Victor smiled when he looked hard at them.

"Okay, *Monsieur terrapène*," he said, "just tell me what you'd like to eat and we'll get it for you. Maybe some tuna?"

They had had tuna fish salad yesterday for dinner, and there was a small bowl of it left over. Victor got a little chunk of it in his fingers and offered it to the terrapin. The terrapin was not interested.

Victor looked around the kitchen, wondering; then seeing the sunlight on the floor of the living room, he picked up the pan and carried it to the living room and set it down so that the sunlight would fall on the terrapin's back. All turtles liked sunlight, Victor thought. He lay down on the floor on his side, propped up on an elbow.

The terrapin stared at him for a moment, then very slowly and with an air of forethought and caution, put out its legs and advanced, found the circular boundary of the pan, and moved to the right, half its body out of the shallow water.

Obviously it wanted to get out, so Victor took it in one hand, by the sides, and said, "You can come out and have a little walk."

He smiled as the terrapin started

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to disappear under the sofa. He caught it easily, because it moved so slowly. When he put it down on the carpet, it was quite still, as if it had withdrawn a little to think what it should do next, where it should go.

The terrapin was brownish green. Looking at it, Victor thought of river bottoms, of river water flowing. Or maybe oceans. Where did terrapins come from? He jumped up and went to the dictionary on the bookshelf. The dictionary had a picture of a terrapin, but it was a dull, black and white drawing, not so pretty as the live one. He learned nothing except that the name was of Algonquian origin, that the terrapin lived in fresh or brackish water, and that it was edible.

Edible. Well, that was bad luck, Victor thought. But he was not going to eat any *terrapène* tonight. It would be all for his mother, that ragout, and even if she slapped him, scolded him, and made him learn an extra two or three poems, he would *not* eat any terrapin tonight.

His mother came out of the bathroom. "What are you doing there?—Victor?"

Victor put the dictionary back on the shelf. His mother had seen the pan. "I'm looking at the terrapin," he said, then realized the terrapin had disappeared. He got down on hands and knees and looked under the sofa.

"Don't put it on the furniture. It makes spots," said his mother. She was standing in the foyer, rubbing her hair vigorously with a towel.

Victor found the terrapin between the wastebasket and the wall. He put it back in the pan.

"Have you changed your shirt?" asked his mother.

Victor changed his shirt, and then at his mother's order sat down on the sofa with *A Child's Garden of Verses* and tackled another poem, a brand-new one for Mrs. Badzerkian. He learned two lines at a time, reading it aloud in a soft voice to himself, then repeating it, then putting two, four, and six lines together, until he had memorized the whole poem. He recited it to the terrapin. Then Victor asked his mother if he could play with the terrapin in the bathtub.

"No! And get your shirt all splashed?"

"I can put on my other shirt."

"No! It's nearly four o'clock now. Get that pan out of the living room!"

Victor carried the pan back to the kitchen. His mother took the terrapin quite fearlessly out of the pan, put it back into the white paper box, closed its lid, and stuck the box in the refrigerator.

Victor jumped a little as the refrigerator door slammed. It would be awfully cold in there for the terrapin. But then, he supposed, fresh or brackish water was cold too.

"Victor, cut the lemon," said his mother. She was fixing the big round

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tray with cups and saucers. The water was boiling in the kettle.

Mrs. Badzerkian was prompt as usual, and his mother poured the tea as soon as her guest had deposited her coat and pocketbook on the foyer chair and sat down. Mrs. Badzerkian smelled of cloves. She had a small, straight mouth and a thin mustache on her upper lip which fascinated Victor, as he had never seen one on a woman before—not at such short range, anyway. He never had mentioned Mrs. Badzerkian's mustache to his mother, knowing it was considered ugly; but in a strange way, her mustache was the thing he liked best about Mrs. Badzerkian.

The rest of her was dull, uninteresting, and vaguely unfriendly. She always pretended to listen carefully to his poetry recitations, but he felt that she fidgeted, thought of other things while he recited, and was glad when it was over. Today, Victor recited very well and without any hesitation, standing in the middle of the living-room floor and facing the two women, who were then having their second cup of tea.

"*Très bien*," said his mother. "Now you may have a cookie."

Victor chose from the plate a small round cookie with a drop of orange goo in its center. He kept his knees close together when he sat down. He always felt that Mrs. Badzerkian looked at his knees and with distaste. He often wished she would make some remark to his mother about his being old enough for long pants, but she never had—at least, not within his hearing.

Victor learned from his mother's conversation with Mrs. Badzerkian that the Lorentzes were coming for dinner tomorrow evening. It was probably for them that the terrapin stew was going to be made. Victor was glad that he would have one more day to play with the terrapin. Tomorrow morning, he thought, he would ask his mother if he could take the terrapin down on the sidewalk for a while, either on a leash or, if his mother insisted, in the paper box.

"—like a chi-ild!" his mother was saying, laughing, with a glance at him, and Mrs. Badzerkian smiled shrewdly at him with her small, tight mouth.

Victor had been excused, and was sitting across the room with a book on the studio couch. His mother was telling Mrs. Badzerkian how he had played with the terrapin. Victor frowned down at his book, pretending not to hear. His mother did not like him to speak to her or her guests once he had been excused. But now she was calling him her "lee-tle ba-aby Veec-tor . . ."

He stood up with his finger in the place in his book. "I don't see why it's childish to look at a terrapin!" he said, flushing with sudden anger. "They are very interesting animals. They—"

His mother interrupted him with

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a laugh, but at once the laugh disappeared and she said sternly, "Victor, I thought I had excused you. Isn't that correct?"

He hesitated, seeing in a flash the scene that was going to take place when Mrs. Badzerkian had left. "Yes, Mama. I'm sorry," he said. Then he sat down and bent over his book again.

Twenty minutes later Mrs. Badzerkian left. His mother scolded him for being rude, but it was not a five or ten minute scolding of the kind he had expected. It lasted barely two minutes. She had forgotten to buy heavy cream, and she wanted Victor to go downstairs and get some.

Victor put on his gray woolen jacket and went out. He always felt embarrassed and conspicuous in the jacket, because it came just a little bit below his short pants, and it looked as if he had nothing on underneath the coat.

Victor looked around for Frank on the sidewalk, but he didn't see him. He crossed Third Avenue and went to a delicatessen in the big building that he could see from the living-room window. On his way back, he saw Frank walking along the sidewalk, bouncing a ball. Victor went right up to him.

"Hey," Victor said. "I've got a terrapin upstairs."

"A what?" Frank caught the ball and stopped.

"A terrapin. You know, like a turtle. I'll bring it down tomorrow morning and show you, if you're around. It's pretty big."

"Yeah? Why don't you bring it down now?"

"Because we're gonna eat now," said Victor. "See you."

He went into his building. He felt he had achieved something. Frank had looked really interested. Victor wished he could bring the terrapin down now, but his mother never liked him to go out after dark, and it was practically dark now.

When Victor got upstairs, his mother was still in the kitchen. Eggs were boiling and she had put a big pot of water on a back burner. "You took it out again!" Victor said, seeing the terrapin's box on the counter.

"Yes. I prepare the stew tonight," said his mother. "That is why I need the cream."

Victor looked at her. "You're going to—you have to kill it tonight?"

"Yes, my little one. Tonight." She jiggled the pot of eggs.

"Mama, can I take it downstairs to show Frank?" Victor asked quickly. "Just for five minutes, Mama. Frank's down there now."

"Who is Frank?"

"He's that fellow you asked me about today. The blond fellow we always see. *Please*, Mama."

His mother's black eyebrows frowned. "Take the *terrapène* downstairs? Certainly not. Don't be absurd, my baby! The *terrapène* is not a toy!"

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Victor tried to think of some other lever of persuasion. He had not removed his coat. "You wanted me to get acquainted with Frank—"

"Yes. What has that got to do with the *terrapène?*"

The water on the back burner began to boil.

"You see, I promised him I'd—" Victor watched his mother lift the terrapin from the box, and as she dropped it into the boiling water his mouth fell open. "*Mama!*"

"What is this? What is this noise?"

Victor, open-mouthed, stared at the terrapin whose legs were now racing against the steep sides of the pot. The terrapin's mouth opened, its eyes looked right at Victor for an instant, its head arched back in torture, then the open mouth sank beneath the seething water—and that was the end.

Victor blinked. The terrapin was dead. He came closer, saw the four legs and the tail stretched out in the water. He looked at his mother.

She was drying her hands on a towel. She glanced at him, then said, "Ugh!" She smelled her hands, then hung the towel back.

"Did you have to kill it like that?"

"How else? The same way you kill a lobster. Don't you know that? It doesn't hurt them."

He stared at her. When she started to touch him, he stepped back. He thought of the terrapin's wide open mouth, and his eyes suddenly flooded with tears. Maybe the terrapin had been screaming and it hadn't been heard over the bubbling of the water. The terrapin had looked at him, wanting him to pull it out, and he hadn't moved to help it. His mother had tricked him, acted so fast that he couldn't save it. He stepped back again. "No, don't touch me!"

His mother slapped his face, hard and quickly.

Victor set his jaw. Then he about-faced and went to the closet and threw his jacket onto a hanger and hung it up. He went into the living room and fell down on the sofa. He was not crying now, but his mouth opened against the sofa pillow. Then he remembered the terrapin's mouth and he closed his lips. The terrapin had suffered, otherwise it would not have moved its legs so terribly fast to get out.

Then Victor wept, soundlessly as the terrapin, his mouth open. He put both hands over his face, so as not to wet the sofa. After a long while he got up.

In the kitchen his mother was humming, and every few seconds he heard her quick, firm steps as she went about her work. Victor had set his teeth again. He walked slowly to the kitchen doorway.

The terrapin was out on the wooden chopping board, and his mother, after a glance at him, still humming, took a knife and bore down on the blade, cutting off the terrapin's little nails. Victor half

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closed his eyes, but he watched steadily. His mother scooped the nails, with bits of skin attached to them, off the board into her palm and dumped them into the garbage bag.

Then she turned the terrapin on its back and with the same sharp, pointed knife she began to cut away the pale bottom shell. The terrapin's neck was bent sideways. Victor wanted to look away, but still he stared. Now the terrapin's insides were all exposed, red and white and greenish.

Victor did not listen to what his mother was saying—something about cooking terrapins in Europe before he was born. Her voice was gentle and soothing, not at all like what she was doing.

"All right, don't look at me like that!" she cried out suddenly, stomping her foot. "What's the matter with you? Are you crazy? Yes, I think so! You are seeck, you know that?"

Victor could not touch any of his supper, and his mother could not force him to, even though she shook him by the shoulders and threatened to slap him. They had creamed chipped beef on toast. Victor did not say a word. He felt very remote from his mother, even when she screamed right into his face. He felt very odd, the way he did sometimes when he was sick to his stomach, but he was not sick to his stomach.

When they went to bed that night, he felt afraid of the dark. He saw the terrapin's face very large, its mouth open, its eyes wide and full of pain. Victor wished he could walk out the window and float, go anywhere he wanted to, disappear, yet be everywhere. He imagined his mother's hands on his shoulders, jerking him back, if he tried to step out the window. He hated his mother.

He got up and went quietly into the kitchen. The kitchen was absolutely dark, as there was no window, but he put his hand accurately on the knife rack and felt gently for the knife he wanted. He thought of the terrapin, in little pieces now, all mixed up in the sauce of cream and egg yolks and sherry in the pot in the refrigerator.

His mother's cry was not silent—it seemed to tear his ears off. His second blow was in her body, and then he stabbed her throat again.

Only tiredness made him stop, and by then people were trying to bump the door in. Victor at last walked to the door, pulled the chain bolt back, and opened it for them.

He was taken to a large, old building full of nurses and doctors. Victor was very quiet and did everything he was asked to do, and answered the questions they put to him, but only those questions; and since they didn't ask him anything about a terrapin, he did not bring it up.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MARGARET AUSTIN**
TITLE:	***Murder at Merryoak***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Lieutenant Richards
LOCALE:	United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*"Beautiful faculty member murdered at exclusive girls' school. Love triangle, mysterious hunchback, missing janitor —it has all the elements . . ."*

AMELIA HANSON'S SOFT, PALE HAIR and softer, white cheek rested on the Wedgewood-green desk blotter. Cameo-perfect, cameo-still, cameo-cold. Visible only enough to mar the picture—as it marred her frilled white blouse—was an ugly blotch now darkening to rusty red; she must have been dead about an hour.

Outside, drops still glistened on the dark windowpane although the drenching rain had ended. Inside, all was quiet, very quiet. Nearly everyone in Merryoak College for Women had left for spring vacation.

After breathing deeply three times, as the dramatics coach taught us to do in times of stress, I lifted the phone and waited for the switchboard's answering click. "Anne," I said, "this is Beanie. Something terrible has happened to Miss Hanson. Will you dial the police, please?"

Anne stayed on the line while I talked with the sergeant, then hurried directly around from Center Hall. Like a row of adjoining houses, our dorms created a spreading "U," with Center Hall as the base and with interconnecting corridors on the ground floor. Two underclass dorms form one arm of the "U," Pearson and Scoby Halls for upperclassmen form the other. Walking from Center through Pearson to Miss Hanson's apartment in Scoby

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usually takes several minutes, but it seemed as if I'd hardly replaced the phone when Anne arrived.

Was her gasp when she saw Miss Hanson from breathlessness or shock? I couldn't tell.

"Lord knows I loathed the woman but I'd never have wished this on her! You know that, don't you, Beanie?" she asked earnestly, her skin taut around worried eyes as she looked up to search my face, which I was certain reflected equal strain.

That embarrassing scene earlier tonight was in both our minds. Anne, big sister to so many of the Merryoak girls, couldn't be capable of murder, but the only tactful reply was, "Yes, Anne. None of us would have wished this on her."

"But someone did." She sighed. "When did you find her? How did it happen?"

"I came down a few minutes ago. The door was open. I looked in and saw her. Then I called the police, as you know."

We talked briefly before deciding to wait in Center Hall for the police. It's awkward having anyone crane up at me so, as usual, I walked a step behind Anne.

As we rounded the corner into Center, we heard the pounding. Outside the mullioned-glass main door stood two men in uniform and one in plainclothes. Anne scurried to let them in, chattering, "Oh, dear, we didn't expect you so quickly. Why didn't you ring the night bell there to the right? The janitor would have opened the door. I'm so sorry."

"Lady, we rang the button right off that bell and no one answered," the older uniformed man said grumpily.

"Where can Roscoe be? He's supposed to answer that bell at night—there's a buzzer in his room."

"Roscoe?" the sleek-haired uniformed man asked.

"Roscoe Jones. The janitor. It's part of his job to answer the night bell when the reception desk is unattended."

Their conversation claimed half my attention; the rest focused on the man in plainclothes who, though younger than the others, appeared to be their superior. He hadn't ducked when he came through the door, but I had expected him to. Once inside, he was too well-proportioned to appear unusually tall. Broad-shouldered and solid, he looked the way every man should, with casual ease in his conservative jacket and a chiseled alertness in his face.

He cut off the uniformed men and Anne with a quiet gesture and turned to me. Not discourteously, but with calm authority.

"I'm Detective Lieutenant Richards, Oakmont Police Department. You must be the girl who reported the death. Kent, isn't it?"

"Yes, Beanie Kent. I'm a senior and Miss Hanson is the senior counselor. We were to decide some details about the graduation exercises to-

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night, but when I arrived . . . well, I found her."

"And you?" swinging back to Anne.

"Anne Lowe—Mrs. Howard Lowe. My husband is a chemistry instructor here," she added. "I'm on duty at the reception desk tonight."

"You'd know who was in the building, then?"

"Yes. There weren't many. My husband was here earlier but he went home before eight—we have a house on College Street. Dean Merrill retired to her apartment here in Center Hall after dinner. She and three other faculty members were playing bridge when I took some papers up. That must have been about 8:30. Let's see, Beanie and Shep—Sally Shepherd, that is—are the only seniors here. Four juniors stayed but they signed out early with dates. The underclassmen who stayed are out for the evening with their counselors—a concert, I believe."

The young lieutenant recapitulated. "So you, your husband, Miss Kent, Miss Shepherd, and the four bridge players were the only ones here earlier—in addition to Miss Hanson, of course?"

"Not quite—Roscoe is here some place."

"Call around and find him. When you do, send him to Miss Hanson's apartment. The Medical Examiner should be here soon. Send him over, too. We'll go there now if Miss Kent will please lead the way."

"Should I tell Dean Merrill?" Anne asked.

"No. Don't tell anyone yet. I'll talk with the Dean later."

He swung in beside me and we stayed in step effortlessly. Somewhere, under layers of preoccupation, I was vaguely thankful for the gentle swish of a sea-green skirt around my long legs, rather than the usual slap-slap of blue jeans.

"How come you're here during vacation?" he asked.

"Home's too far away for a week's vacation. And then, I've some special work to do before comprehensives next month." No reason to add that home hasn't been very pleasant since Mother died. That Dad, embarrassed by a daughter who tops him three inches, is relieved to have me spend the winters in a distant college and the summers as a camp counselor, where I don't remind him that he sired a hulk of a daughter instead of a fine son.

"Where were you earlier this evening?"

"I read the papers in Center Hall until about 7:35, then went upstairs to do some laundry and wash my hair." Ruefully, I poked at my rough-toweled mop. Only a slight natural curl kept the carrot strands from dangling completely lank. "Miss Hanson was in Center Hall when I left," I volunteered.

"Upstairs, I take it, would be in the senior dormitory. Anyone else up there?"

"Just Shep—she was studying in

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her room." Our voices echoed along the empty halls, punctuated by the equally resounding staccato heel taps of the two officers behind us.

"Did you hear anything unusual —a scream, or anything?"

No, there had been nothing. How would a scream have sounded, twisting through empty corridors, in and out of vacant study rooms? Would it have carried to the third floor, to Shep's and my rooms? I didn't know.

He asked then about Shep and I told him she would be the 58th in our graduating class—if she pulled her marks over the line. If not, her family will disown her, so she's cramming a year's work between now and comps. That brought us to Scoby Hall, where I indicated Miss Hanson's door. Opening it, he motioned the uniformed men to follow.

The sleek-haired one gave a low whistle. "Wish I'd met her when she was alive!"

At the Lieutenant's scowl, he quickly fumbled with the camera case slung over his shoulder. The older policeman was unloading a black case of scientific-appearing paraphernalia. I wavered on the threshold uncertainly, but they were interested only in examining the room and its occupant.

After a swiftly expert inspection of Miss Hanson—would he write the "body" or the "corpse" in his report?—Lieutenant Richards strolled around the apartment, glanced into the bedroom and tiny kitchenette; then, shading a pane from the room's reflection, he peered out the window across the campus to the river and the scattered houses beyond. Like this one, my window faced away from the courtyard and overlooked River Campus. To the left would be an arc of light from the lamp outside the library. Darkness would enshroud the rest, with darker blobs masking shrubs and trees. When the dorm was full and lights beamed from every window, it was easy to pick out the white fence guarding the high riverbank, now deeply undercut in several places. But lights didn't shine from every window tonight. Only the library lamp would force back the darkness.

The Lieutenant turned to survey the main room, which served both as office and living room. When Miss Hanson joined the faculty last fall, the apartment was redecorated in Wedgewood green, white, and shell pink—colors well chosen, for even in death she gave the impression of a Dresden figurine skillfully displayed amid antique-white furniture.

At first she enchanted us—so tiny, so perfect. Later, a few of us inadvertently exposed the clay beneath a glaze of perfection. Joan Gage did so when she wore an orange sweater the time Joan and Miss Hanson shared the rostrum for Chapel period. Miss Hanson, of course, was wearing pale pink. I did so when I rushed into Center once

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while Miss Hanson was greeting a male guest. My hulk sent her reeling, but I always thought her cold fury partly his fault. He could have helped her up before laughing.

Anne Lowe won her hatred by being married to the best-looking man on campus. At first, hatred—later, scorn as Miss Hanson brought Howard Lowe to heel at her command. On masculine scales, how had Anne's undisciplined brown curls, snub nose, and ordinarily even disposition balanced against Amelia Hanson's china beauty and calculated flattery? Again I remembered that ugly scene in Center.

I was reading in a corner chair when Miss Hanson came in. She glided to Howard, who stood talking with Anne, and, ignoring her, Miss Hanson said petulantly, "Howie, you were supposed to stop by again—to discuss those low mid-semester grades, you know. Where have you been?"

He mumbled about an experiment in the Science Building and inched away from her. She followed, and tracing his lapel with one pink-tipped finger, simpered up at him, "Even brilliant young chemistry instructors have to relax sometime. Isn't that right, Anne dear?"

Anne flushed but reminded Howard calmly that Tippy, their spaniel, was waiting at home, unfed, for Howard.

Miss Hanson smiled too sweetly. "Do go home and feed the dog, Howie. Some kinds of chemistry we can discuss anytime, isn't that right?"

I tried to sneak out unseen but Miss Hanson called, "Don't forget, Beanie dear, we have an appointment later." Her voice was honey-layered venom.

Her next comment to the Lowes was too low for me to hear, but Anne's retort carried.

"Amelia Hanson, I've taken enough! Howard and I had a good marriage until you came here and we'll have a good marriage again. If he hasn't the guts to . . ."

The turn into Pearson Hall muffled the rest—and I was glad. Anne is favorite people. Until recently, I'd thought Howard pretty special, too . . .

Lieutenant Richards, finishing his inspection, glanced impatiently at his watch. "Nearly ten. Couldn't they locate Doc Butler?"

In denial, a drumming of hard heels reverberated along the tile-floored corridor and a bald, portly man appeared carrying the inevitable black bag. Nodding to the Lieutenant, he inquired perfunctorily, "Got all your pictures?"

After an affirmative answer, he plodded to the desk, now spotted with sooty powder, and unpacked the bag. I retreated to the stairway and sank down heavily. Surely this nausea would pass if I just sat quietly without thinking about the doctor and Miss Hanson.

But I couldn't block out the voices.

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"Hmm. Died instantly. Comparatively little blood. Must have pierced the aorta. Massive internal hemorrhage. Can't say for sure till after the autopsy, of course."

"What kind of weapon would you say?" That was the Lieutenant's deep, calm voice.

"Metal blade. Sharp. Some kind of knife probably. Maybe seven, eight inches long. It was an upward thrust. Whoever did it probably stood in front of the desk, just about where you are."

"What about that blood on the floor? Hers? And those smudges?"

"Probably, but we'll run a test. Looks like someone stepped in it, then walked to the door."

My green flats stretched before me, clean new suede, silver buckles catching the soft hall light. But somewhere there was a shoe with blood on it.

"How long has she been dead?"

"Can't tell for sure, of course, but from the coagulation I'd estimate two to three hours. Closer to two—start with eight o'clock and work forward or back from there."

"Thanks, Doc. Get the report to me soon as possible, okay?"

"Don't I always?"

"Sure, sure . . . Sam, after the doc gets her out of here, wrap up your work and seal the door." The last was called from the doorway, then he wheeled and looked for me.

"You've had a rough night, but there are a few more points I'd like to check on. Mind coming along? There wasn't anything in the room that could have killed her. Did you see, or maybe pick up, a knife?"

"No, when I called the station I didn't see anything like that. But she always kept a Turkish knife on the desk. It's an antique she got in Istanbul last year while teaching at Roberts University."

"Sharp?"

"Yes, very. She used it as a paperknife."

"Sounds like she'd have been wiser to use a fingernail like the rest of us."

A quick glance proved he hadn't meant to be humorous.

Anne's back was a sagging question mark over the reception desk where she was toting up stamps and cash. She straightened with effort when the Lieutenant asked if she'd located the janitor.

"No," she replied. "I've phoned every hall of the dorms and every place else. I checked his room downstairs and the boiler room. He just doesn't seem to be here." Her dark brows drew together in perplexity. "He always checks out at the reception desk when he leaves. After all, it's his job to be here in case anything happens."

"When did you last see him?"

"All the doors are locked at eight. He came through here shortly before and threw the catches—spring locks, you know."

"So he would have been near Miss Hanson's apartment about eight?"

She nodded slowly. Even her

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short brown curls seemed to lack their usual spring. The Lieutenant jotted a few words in a notebook he'd drawn from an inner pocket, then asked for more information about Roscoe.

"He's small, maybe five feet two inches tall, about fifty, I'd guess, and—well, rather peculiar." After his questioning glance from the Lieutenant, she continued, "He's a quiet little gnome. Scrambles around, does his job without talking much to anyone. I've tried to be friendly, but he's—well, difficult."

"Can you think of any reason why he'd kill her?"

The question startled Anne. She mulled it over before answering. "No, I don't think so. Her tongue was sharp at times but that isn't reason enough for murder. Unless . . . unless she knew he wasn't going to be rehired next year and taunted him with it. Dean Merrill hadn't told him yet."

The Lieutenant considered this, then asked Anne to ring the apartment. "Sam, check all the outside doors—especially those on the North side. If you find any footprints, mark them for casts. Watch your own big feet—don't go messing up any good tracks that might be out there. Another thing, prop open the door when you go out—you can get out but you can't get back in."

Anne saw me start to fold and caught my arm. Slapping down the phone, Lieutenant Richards grabbed the other arm. They eased me into a chair and the Lieutenant forced my head down between my knees. When the kaleidoscope slowed to become the blue and white squares of the tiled floor, I struggled up and attempted to regain poise.

Lieutenant Richards blamed himself for dragging me around after the shock I'd had. His concern was a shield against the scenes of the night.

"Here, you need some fresh air," he said.

"But her hair's still damp—and she doesn't have a coat," protested Anne.

I replied weakly, "It's warm out—I'll be all right."

"Wear my scarf, anyway," Anne insisted. "I won't need it again tonight." She took it from the closet, which was bare except for her raincoat and purse. Considerate even now, she didn't offer the coat, which I could never have squeeezed into.

Obediently, I knotted the scarf under my chin, and leaning on the Lieutenant's arm, let him lead me into the courtyard, past an empty squad car and a police ambulance. From behind the wheel a man glanced at us, then arched a glowing butt to the brick pavement.

We walked slowly down the driveway to College Street, always in perfect step, effortlessly as a matched team of show Hackneys. "Hackneys?" I thought, "Clydesdales are more like it." A strong hand under my elbow helped me up the curb

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and guided me carefully around puddles still standing on the sidewalk. This big man could be thoughtful and gentle. Odd in a police officer who dealt primarily in violence.

We strolled in silence to the corner of Ravine Street. There I halted with an involuntary gasp. Between us and the street light stood a maple, the Norway variety whose leaves when first unfurling show a light crimson color. The tiny leaves still shimmered with rain and with the light behind them they traced a delicately intricate pattern of sheen and shadow. They were living lace.

He paused, too, and following my gaze, saw the rain-silvered lace. We strolled on across the street and into a neighborhood park. The bench was still wet, but his handkerchief sopped up most of the moisture.

"Cigarette?" he asked.

"Please."

He lit one for each of us. "You're a funny kid," he said. "You go through a hell like tonight and keep your emotions under control until you nearly collapse. Then some wet maple leaves stop you in your tracks and bring tears to your eyes. I saw them, don't deny it."

The automatic denial died unspoken. Instead, in a low voice I quoted, " 'Spring had come like the silver needle-note of a fife.' "

"That's good. What's the next line?"

" 'Like a white plume and a green lance and a . . . a glittering knife.' " The silk scarf slipped to the back of my head. I didn't move to replace it.

He inhaled, blew the smoke deliberately toward the street light, then asked, "What's this 'Beanie' business? Some kind of nickname?"

"Yes. In a girls' school—or women's college, as the Dean prefers to hear it called— nearly everyone has a nickname. 'Beanie' was tacked on the first week of freshman year." After four years, I could explain unemotionally, "From beanpole, of course."

His inspection was so impersonal that a blush would have been unduly self-conscious.

"You may have been a beanpole then but not any more," was his judgment. True, modern dance and swimming and summer camp activities had helped.

"What's the name on your birth certificate?"

"Erica Louise Kent."

"Erica. I like that. It's statuesque. Incidentally, my first name is Rod—preferred to Rodney. But the police manual limits the amount of time I can spend talking to a titian-tressed witness—so if you're feeling steady now we'd better start back."

Maybe he'd had it in mind all along but he made the question sound like an afterthought. "Don't the Lowes live on College Street?"

"Yes, the gray colonial on the next block."

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When we reached the house, we heard Tippy barking sharply before the open doorway silhouetted Howard's thin height. A copper porch lantern winked on, illuminating his rumpled clothes and tousled hair, which his fingers were attempting to rake into its customary crisp neatness. Recognizing me, he asked us in.

Lieutenant Richard's title didn't register immediately. Then Howard blinked and asked sharply, "Nothing's happened to Anne?"

"No, Mr. Lowe," the Lieutenant replied, "but I'd like to ask a few questions about Miss Hanson. You were at the school this evening?"

"Yes, for dinner. We always stay when my wife has the desk at night. I returned home early and was grading papers until I dozed off." He scooped test papers off the sofa and offered the sofa to us, taking an armchair for himself. The black and white spaniel gave us an exploratory snuff, then settled against his master's leg.

"Anyone see you?"

"Only Tippy. Unquestionably he's high IQ, but sadly lacking in English grammar." His chemical-stained fingers rubbed the spaniel's floppy ear fondly. "But why the inquisition?"

The Lieutenant gave it to him bluntly. "Someone murdered Amelia Hanson tonight. Around eight, we think."

"Lord, no! We were talking with Milly shortly before that!"

"Tell me about it." The Lieutenant hadn't missed that "Milly."

The ESP wasn't working—Howard was too stunned, I guess, to note my warning nod. He told the Lieutenant about the scene in Center Hall, including Anne's final retort that she would preserve their marriage even if it meant going to the Dean.

Lieutenant Richards thought briefly, then asked, "Miss Kent overheard the argument?"

"Most of it. She left before the end."

The Lieutenant gave me a steady, appraising look before questioning Howard again. "You left right after that?"

"Yes—at about a quarter of eight."

"The doors aren't locked until eight, are they? You could have walked around the outside and reentered by another door? Then waited until the janitor made his rounds and left again?"

"I suppose I could have, but I didn't. Tippy hadn't been fed." He gave a quivering, mirthless laugh and observed, "That's moronic, isn't it? Actually, you must take my word for it. It wouldn't occur to me to be in the dorms after lockup—if Dean Merrill found out, I'd be finished academically."

"What was there between you and Amelia Hanson? It must have been something to get your wife so roused."

"I admit I was infatuated but it

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was nothing more than that. You know, Lieutenant, Milly could 'shake the saintship of an anchorite' —and that's a status I've never claimed. But it was finished—only Milly wouldn't admit it." He ended defiantly, "Anne is my wife and I love her."

"Don't leave town, Mr. Lowe. I'll want to talk with you again."

Back at the dorms, the Lieutenant looked at me and said, "You're completely shot. Got any sleeping pills?"

"No, but Shep probably does."

"Take one and get a good night's rest. You need it. And ask Miss Shepherd to come down here."

The underclassmen burst in then, laughing and chattering. They eyed us curiously, signed in, and trooped off to the south wing.

"Located that janitor yet?" Lieutenant Richards asked Anne.

"No, he's just disappeared."

"We'd better get out a bulletin on him. I'll want a full description after I talk with the Dean—stick around, there's more I want to ask you, too." He noticed that I was still there. "Didn't I send you to bed? Scoot!"

I scooted.

Only Shep's black hair rose in wild peaks above the fortress of history books, notebooks, and stacks of outlines. Chewed ends of a dozen pencils further testified to a concentrated evening.

"Lieutenant Richards from the Police Department wants to talk to you down in Center," I called through the door.

"Police? What did I do?" She journeyed slowly back through the centuries and above the books. "Or is it about that hunchback? Did he make off with the Alumnae silver service?" She was completely 20th century again.

"What hunchback?" I asked, startled.

"The one on River Campus tonight. I'd killed off Charles the First and needed a cigarette before tackling grim Cromwell and his laws. What ever possessed me to be a history major! Anyway, the smoking lounge smelled foul, so I raised a window. That's when I saw him."

"How could you see anything in the dark and rain?"

"Oh, I couldn't see much. But you know how movement catches your eye when everything else is still? Well, something moved and after a while I could make out a hunchbach figure jolting along beyond the library light. Then I lost him in the shadows."

"What time was that?"

"Half-past the seventeenth century," she answered wryly. "Really, I have no idea. Maybe half an hour before I passed you coming from the shower room. Maybe more. I have trouble remembering the day—it is Tuesday, isn't it?—without worrying about time." A worried expression furrowed her gamin face. "Should I have called the Dean?"

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"It was probably nothing," I reassured her, "but tell the Lieutenant about it. Oh, Shep," I added, "do you have any sleeping pills?"

"Sure, friend," She reached into a drawer and tossed me a bottle. "One knocks you out, two keep you out, more keep you out permanently. You look like you could use some sleep."

"Just one night's worth, thanks," I answered . . .

I heard the breakfast bells dimly but rolled over to dream that I was traveling home. Then the train was derailed and Anne Lowe stood in the ruins screaming, "You can't have him," and somewhere in the darkness Roscoe snickered. A flashlight bobbed along and I saw it was carried by Lieutenant Richards. . .

Then I awakened.

Automatically, my hand reached into the closet for a pair of blue jeans, but instead I chose a plaid skirt and beige sweater, one of several that I had bought with Dad's Christmas check.

Shep reported later that after breakfast Dean Merrill, with her customary dignity, had announced Miss Hanson's death. She also had asked everyone to stay off River Campus. During the night a section of the bank had caved in, carrying with it part of the guard fence. Although it was hidden from the dorms by a thick clump of trees and shrubs, the police had discovered the cave-in while searching for Roscoe.

Dean Merrill sent word for me to come to her office. When I got there the hall was jammed with men who looked suspiciously like reporters, so I retreated quietly. The Dean, with her mother lioness' guardianship of Merryoak's reputation, wouldn't want me to talk with them any more than I wished to be questioned.

The courtyard was a new spring world, refusing to admit death or ugliness. Cotillion patterns of tulips bowed formally to their partners; fingers of ivy swathed the drab brick buildings with softening green. In the glory of the sunlight I could remember feeling last night's horror, but I could not recapture the horror itself—any more than pain, once past, can be recaptured. Unexpectedly, I was hungry.

Halfway to McGill Cottage, Lieutenant Richards hailed me, then loped with long strides to the path where I waited for him.

"Good morning," he said cheerily. "You're looking much better—almost human, I might say!"

I laughed and informed him I would be after some breakfast. Could I offer him a cup of coffee?

Usually you had to wriggle and push through noisy females in McGill's crowded snack room. Today we had it to ourselves—even the ashtrays were empty.

"Sugar and cream, Lieutenant?" I asked, heading for the kitchen.

"Make it black—and forget the 'Lieutenant.' Didn't I tell you the name is Rod?"

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He tagged along and hitched himself onto a counter while I pushed bread into the toaster and measured coffee and water into the pot.

"Domesticity becomes you," he commented, "but I'm not here to make flattering remarks. My hidden purpose is to pump you."

"Fine," I said. "Is the privilege mutual?"

He considered gravely, lips pursed but eyes amused. "If you give me good straight answers I might let you in on a few police secrets. First, is the college much troubled with strangers wandering around the campus at night?"

"No, not often. Once in a while a drunk blunders through the gates or fellows drive over from the University to serenade, but we seldom have trouble with outsiders. Why ask me about it? Isn't Dean Merrill the one to quiz?"

"I talked with her last night, but now I want your opinions. You're senior class secretary, on the Student Government Council, and hold a couple of other offices. You should have a good idea of what goes on around here."

"You've been busy with your homework, Lieutenant!"

"Just doing my duty, ma'am," he said with mock humility.

We talked about the hunchback that Shep saw, or thought she saw, the night before. I was inclined to dismiss it as an optical trick of eyes that were overstrained from constant study. Rod (as I now called him freely) reserved decision. Dean Merrill wanted to believe there actually had been a hunchbacked stranger—an eminently more desirable solution, from the school's viewpoint, to the murder. The only thing Shep was positive about was that it had not been Roscoe.

Which brought us to the question I dreaded, but had decided to answer honestly: What did the other girls, what did I, think of the janitor?

"No one liked him. He's a maggot with a Peeping Tom mania—not at all what one wants around a women's dormitory. He's supposed to call out before going into any hall but sometimes he waits until he's passed a couple of rooms, then ogles the girls scurrying for cover. Student Government Council lodged a complaint with the Dean, which I suppose is why he's being dismissed."

That covered Roscoe sufficiently without delving into my personal experience. He'd come into the shower room quietly one day while I was there. Somehow, I felt his slimy presence and whirled to see him standing there, his thick lips pressed together and his pale hands clenched. I had grabbed a towel and yelled to him to get out. He went, but when we met after that I could feel his eyes remembering. There was a case study in Psych 302 of a short man with a compulsive attraction to tall women. The technical terms eluded me but it was all terribly unsavory.

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Picking up a cigarette was a mistake: Rod noticed my shaking hand. Steadying it between both of his own, he said, "Here now, you're all upset again. This will never do. What you need is some relaxation and a chance to forget about this whole mess. If you have some decent shoes instead of those flats I'll take you dancing tomorrow night."

Together we looked at my rubber-soled beige shoes with wide silver buckles.

"Aren't those like the ones you had on last night?" he asked.

"You're very observant, officer! Only the color has been changed to preserve the color scheme. When I can find a size and style that fit, I buy in every hue."

"And that, Erica, is the attitude we're going to change," he said sternly. "It may make your school friends think 'She's a jolly good fellow,' but it doesn't amuse me. Remember, I've been through this, too. The jibes, the tired jokes—'How's the weather up there?'—and it must be rougher for a girl. You've tried for a rhinoceros-hide flippancy—acceptance is better."

I sat, head lowered, unable to think of a suitable retort.

He continued more lightly, "Do you appreciate the advantage we tall ones have at a parade? It's helpful changing light bulbs, too. And wait until you behold the admiring glances we draw on the dance floor—you'll learn to walk proud, me girl! But now the police manual says there's more work to be done. Have the reporters trapped you yet?"

"No, I ducked them outside the Dean's office."

"Good girl! They're going to blow this up: Beautiful faculty member murdered at exclusive girls' school. Love triangle, mysterious hunchback, missing janitor—it has all the elements for a *cause célèbre*. Stay far away from those paper vultures."

"I'll start by hiding out in the kitchen," I said, collecting the plate and coffee cups.

"Fine, I'm going to be busy—if I don't see you before then, will seven tomorrow be okay? It's payday, so I'll throw in a dinner. Suit you?"

The next day and a half plodded by. I kept to McGill Cottage or my room except at mealtimes and thus evaded the reporters. Dean Merrill lectured me about school loyalty and why hadn't I called her immediately on finding Miss Hanson's body? As freshmen, she intimidated us; as seniors, we respected her dignified ability to cope with the multiple problems caused by nearly 500 girls. Now, her patrician head with its starched white waves was held proudly, as always, but her tired eyes revealed distress and strain.

Neither Howard nor Anne Lowe came on campus, probably at the Dean's request. It was a time of stress for all of us, with policemen

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tramping the halls and a constant coterie of reporters in Center Hall.

As Rod had predicted, the murder was receiving wide publicity. Thursday, Dad, acting the dutiful parent, phoned and asked if I wished to come home until the publicity blew over. He seemed relieved when I said I was quite all right and would have to stay and testify at the inquest anyway.

Rod called for me as planned and we drove far out of the city to a candlelit club that featured excellent rare steaks and a more than adequate five-piece combo. As we circled the floor with long, smooth glides, I silently blessed those instructors who had coerced me into learning the basic steps. Under the music's influence Rod's chiseled features relaxed gradually and lost some of their tired rigidity.

We talked of everything except cabbages and kings—our mutual interest in animals, his reasons for taking a B.S. in Police Administration, his work toward a Master's degree, the books and music we liked, the television programs we didn't—until the first orchestra intermission.

Then I opened the subject we both had avoided.

He slid the creme de menthe glass thoughtfully in small circles on the tablecloth. "Frankly, I don't like the way this investigation is going. There is no strong probability—just four good possibilities."

He ticked them off. "First, Roscoe. He's our best bet. Rotten character, and he was in the building at about the time of the murder. He kills her for one of several reasons, then fades out. I don't think he's clever enough to hide indefinitely. Every mole must surface sometime.

"Second, the unknown hunchback. This missing stranger is too pat. People notice a hunchback but no one else saw this one. We've covered the whole neighborhood and called in every patrolman on duty Tuesday night. If he ever existed the earth has swallowed him. He's an easy out that I can't quite buy.

"Third and fourth, the Lowes. We can build a strong case against either of them on circumstantial evidence. It might even hold up in court, too. They both had the opportunity. Howard could have cut back through one of the doors before lock-up, then slipped out later. Anne could have left the desk long enough to do the job—she left to take papers up to the Dean's apartment and to look downstairs for Roscoe. She could just as easily have gone over to the apartment in Scoby Hall. You shouldn't need an outline of their motives. Anne was fighting for her marriage and, in a way, Howard was, too."

He studied the four fingers he had raised—one for each suspect—then closed his hand into a hard, tight fist.

"But there isn't a single concrete bit of evidence against any one of

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the four. Any tracks that might have been outside were washed away by the rain. None of them can prove their stories, but we can't disprove them. It's not exactly a stalemate, but it's getting uncomfortably close. We plug along with routine procedures while the papers are demanding a sensational solution. The Chief wants action on a silver platter—and I don't even have the platter."

"What about fingerprints," I asked. "In detective stories the police always seem to find one that seals the case."

"We found fingerprints, all right—enough to cover everybody at Merryoak. The only ones with real meaning would be the ones on that knife handle. But first we need the knife."

"Doesn't that eliminate Anne? She couldn't go out to hide it without getting wet. Her scarf was dry and she didn't wear rainboots."

"There must be a hundred places in those buildings where a knife could be hidden until it was safe to carry it out. We can't pull apart the whole college in our search. As for the rainboots—well, that's an interesting point in itself."

He didn't offer more, so after a moment I asked, "What about the bloodstained shoe the coroner mentioned?"

"My, what big ears you have, grandma! Nope, that's another blind alley. No one connected with the case has a bloody shoe."

They must have searched my room, too. It gave me an eerie feeling. "What's the next step, Rod?"

"Wish I knew. Just keep plugging along on what we have and hope one of the Lowes breaks, I guess. Or that Roscoe shows up. Somehow I feel that if we find Roscoe or the knife—or both—the case will crack wide open. If not—well, dear children, that's how Lieutenant Richards happened to retire as only a lieutenant."

With a decisive move he finished the liqueur. "So that's that and we're supposed to be relaxing. Let's dance."

My temple fit neatly into the curve of his cheek. *Wunderbar!* And more than *Wunderbar* when his lips brushed my forehead. I walked proud that night.

On Sunday the dorms filled again. A few girls hadn't heard of the murder and entered chattering of dates and dances at home. This changed abruptly. I found myself a celebrity—whether more for discovering the body or for Shep's report of the young lieutenant's now obvious and almost daily attentions, it was difficult to decide. Roscoe was voted the immediate, almost unanimous choice as culprit, and someone passed a petition expressing loyalty to Howard and Anne Lowe.

On Monday, Merryoak returned to educating young ladies. Howard Lowe conducted his classes as usual

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except that he dismissed Analytical Chemistry ahead of the bell and neglected to give the freshmen an assignment.

Anne Lowe took her shift at the desk, but talking with her was uncomfortable. Her gay comments were brittle, and sometimes she skidded in the middle of a sentence, as though she'd hit a detour sign. She clung to my hand once and pleaded, "Beanie, you know neither Howard nor I killed her, don't you?" This from Anne, who always bolstered me when the willies hit!

She had said—eons ago it now seemed — that she and Howard would have a good marriage again. I wondered, and felt a strong empathy with her. Those eons ago I was a woman in age but, by the unique insulation of a woman's college, very much the schoolgirl. Now, a woman in age and emotion, I understood her feeling for Howard and how the spears of suspicion tore at them.

Monday night the call came from Center Hall: male guest for Erica Kent. "Erica? That's Beanie!" someone shrieked. Fifty-six seniors immediately needed stamps or wanted to read the papers or had forgotten to check on their laundry. I borrowed mascara from Shep, darkened my red lashes and half my eyelids, removed the brown goo, and tried again.

Rod was talking with Anne when I entered Center Hall. He took my arm, and apparently oblivious of 56 curious girls, escorted me to the door. Then he turned with a grin and gave a sweeping, cavalier bow to the mob. All he lacked was the plumed hat. Even Anne laughed.

Mostly, we just walked and talked. With River Campus, where the girls usually strolled with dates, still closed, we formed the habit of making the park at the corner of College and Ravine Streets our ultimate goal, no matter from which direction we started.

"Rod," I asked when we reached the bench and lighted cigarettes, "what will happen tomorrow at the inquest?"

"There'll be a decision of 'death by an unknown sharp instrument at the hands of person or persons unknown,' and the case may stay that way in the files for the next twenty years. The Chief is under pressure to charge someone, but so far I've persuaded him to wait. Fortunately, the D.A.'s office is on my side—they want a sure conviction."

"Wait? For what?"

"I don't know exactly, but we're bound to get a break." He burst out ironically, "That's the trouble with amateur criminals—they're out of character. Why don't they leave crime to the professionals? If it had been a pro we'd have had him rounded up by now—or at least, we'd have known who he was and where to look. We'd have known his M.O., had his prints on file, and had contacts to keep an ear to the ground for us. But no, here we deal

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with the unknown and wait for pressure to crack the surface."

I said soothingly, "Roscoe's in character, isn't he?"

"Yes," he admitted grudgingly. "But where is he? He can't live without money and he left too fast to have much on him. He's faded out too completely Someone should have turned him in by now."

"Rod," I asked, more to change the subject than because I really wanted to know, "did you ever suspect me?"

"My dear, you and Sally Shepherd were both grist for the official mill. It didn't grind out fine enough—you alibi each other and neither of you has a motive. Oh, it's obvious you didn't like the woman, but normal people don't go through life sticking knives in women they merely dislike. And you," he concluded, easing an arm comfortably around my shoulders, "are becoming desirably normal."

The inquest went as he predicted except that he forgot to mention the press. It was: Miss Kent, hold it a minute, look this way, stand by the officer, what were your feelings when you found the body, and finally, there go the Lowes—get a shot of them in the car.

After dinner I borrowed a sleeping pill from Shep and went to bed without even looking at the papers.

On Wednesday a new revolution in Africa knocked the murder at Merryoak off the front pages, much to Dean Merrill's relief. The ramrod was gone from her back, and for the first time she looked old.

It rained all that day. On my way to an Elizabethan seminar I saw Howard walking Tippy along College Street. Below his doggy raincoat, the spaniel's feathers drooped wetly. His tail was at half-mast, in sympathy with either the day or his master's mood. That night Rod and I held hands in a movie and navigated the evening without mentioning the case.

The rain still dripped half-heartedly the next morning but by early afternoon it cleared. Some policemen were milling around Center, but by now we were used to them.

Rod looked terribly glum when I joined him that evening, and as we crossed the court I wished it were possible for me to help. He was taking this stalemate as a personal affront to his ability as a police officer. Did the Chief see it in that light, too?

We walked along College Street. Rod was quiet, withdrawn, and I was silent, too, knowing that he would tell me his thoughts when he was ready to do so. The streetlight glistened again through the leaves of the maple on the corner of Ravine Street, but they had outgrown the spring-lace phase and were now only angular maple leaves.

At the corner park we silently, automatically, sat on the bench. Rod lit two cigarettes, handed me one and slumped back, his head against the top slat. We smoked

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without talking and then, carefully flipping away the cigarette, he turned to me.

"We found Roscoe this afternoon," he said.

"Oh?" It was somewhere between a question and a gasp.

"Yes, the river's so high it washed away part of the fallen bank. A kid walking along the far shore saw an arm sticking out of the mud and had sense enough to come to the police. It took some digging—the body's in bad shape, but there's no doubt—it's Roscoe. The Turkish dagger is still in his back."

I sat, still and cold and hardly breathing, waiting for what would follow.

"Erica, Erica, *why?*"

It was wrung from him, this question that must have been torturing him since they moved Roscoe and found the size-10 blue shoe that was so unmistakably mine, the silver buckled flat that had caught in the mud when I dropped Roscoe. I'd hardly noticed it then, so frantically was I hacking away at the rain-weakened overhang. Only later, limping across campus on one shoe, did I realize the other one was gone, irretrievably. After taking Shep's sleeping pill, I'd ripped the one I still had with a razor blade and flushed away the strips, as in a dream.

"Erica, Erica, why?"

His question echoed in my heart. He could fit together the pieces of what I'd done but could he ever understand why?

"You must have killed her first, probably hysterically."

Yes, darling, that's how it happened. I went directly to her apartment from that spectacle in Center Hall. I had cooled off somewhat by the time she arrived. Nothing would have happened if only she'd kept quiet. She couldn't. After we'd gone into the apartment, she sat at the desk and lashed out.

"So I suppose you'll spread your eavesdropping all over the school? Let me warn you, Miss Beanpole, that if you do, you'll find I can make you very sorry!"

I was calmly controlled as I protested that I had no intention of repeating anything I had overheard —that my regard for the Lowes would prevent that without threats from her.

"I'll just bet it would! Don't worry, my pet, Howard Lowe would never look twice at a monster like you in those awful jeans and shirt." Her scorn was coldly, cruelly feminine. I was bitterly aware of my hanging shirt tail and rolled-up pants cuffs. Her eyes narrowed viciously. "Or is it Howard you're interested in? You and Anne are mighty chummy . . . Let one word of this leak out and I'll make it so ugly that you and Anne Lowe will both be out of here before graduation!"

Slowly I understood her meaning, knew that she was capable of it, knew that in the atmosphere of a woman's college no truth could com-

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pletely dispel her subtle lies. And suddenly my calmness, my control were gone. The knife was there. I grabbed it, used it, and then stood, disbelieving what I'd done.

Rod was speaking again: "And Roscoe saw it happen?" His hands gripped my shoulders, biting into flesh as though to squeeze out a denial, a reasonable explanation.

Yes, Roscoe saw it happen. But he would have kept quiet—he said so. Oh, Rod, he was a foul little man—you should have seen his eyes and his wet lips when he offered silence. It was cleaner, more decent, to reach down over his shoulder with that knife.

"Then you carried him across River Campus—that would be the hunchback Shep saw from the window—to the overhang, where you buried him?"

Yes, dear, you have nearly all the pieces now. I'll never know how I had the presence to strip off my muddy clothes and tiptoe back through those silent halls to the cleansing, calming force of a shower, to wave to Shep when I came out a few minutes later, to dress and keep the "appointment" two people had heard Miss Hanson remind me of.

"Erica, why?" Rod asked again, shaking me slightly.

I lowered my head to his shoulder, where it curved up to meet his neck, and wondered if he could feel the tears. No, the rough lapel would catch them. His hand passed gently over my hair, just once, then moved to grip my wrist. Standing suddenly, he pulled me to my feet.

"Erica Kent, I arrest you for the deaths of Amelia Hanson and Roscoe Jones, and it is my duty to inform you that anything you say . . ."

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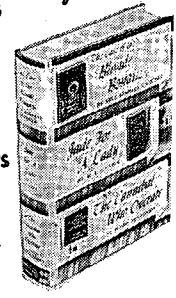

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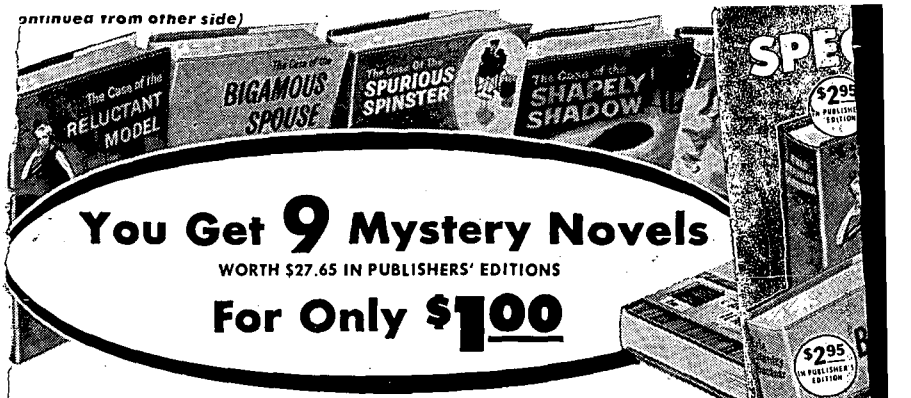
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